

**Finding Spirituality:
a critical revaluation of English drama since 1935
through the medium of the dramatic text.**

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PhD Thesis

Declaration of Authorship

I, Christopher O'Shaughnessy, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Christopher O'Shaughnessy

Date: 1 April 2023

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support of my two supervisors Dr Ben Levitas and Professor John London throughout the writing of this thesis with its integral practice-as-research aspect. Their continued interest in me and my research into ways of finding and evaluating spirituality in dramatic texts has been much valued.

The very real multi-disciplinary ethos of Goldsmiths has also played a supportive role. Early encouragement from academics representing other disciplines in the college such as English, Faith and Civil Society, Sociology and Visual Cultures saw the project off to a confident start.

Without the support of staff from the British Library, Goldsmiths Library, Heythrop College Library, the London Library, Senate House Library, the Warburg Institute, the National Archives and the former Colindale Newspaper Library, the research would not have been possible. I am particularly grateful to the staff of the London Library who sent me books through the post during the pandemic when all libraries and universities were closed.

Special thanks to Lisa Dowdeswell (the Virginia Woolf Estate) and Paul Johnson (the National Archives Image Library) for their assurances regarding the copyright status of the material.

Theatre directors who followed this project, read, directed or took part in rehearsals of my two single-authored practice-as-research plays, are Lesley Ewen, Kirk Jameson, Debbie Kent, Ace Lawson, Jack Patterson, Guy Retallack and Martin Wall. My thanks to them all. When Guy withdrew from the project owing to clashing commitments, Jack Patterson offered to direct the rehearsals and performances of both *The Ruth Ellis Show* and *Servants*.

Enormous gratitude to the Goldsmiths production and rehearsal teams of both plays and especially to lead actors Stephanie Briggs, Liam Fleming, Mack Newton, Katie Turner, Melissa Wadsworth and Rob Wallis for their love and commitment to the project; to Ellie Isherwood for sound design and to Ziggi Szafranski for lighting; to Tom Granthier and Josie Underwood for their inspired choreography for *The Ruth Ellis Show*.

I would like to thank photographer Greg Funnell for his excellent rehearsal photographs, Mark Edmondson for his help with the original DVD transfers, graphic design artists Maria Portugal and Dom Richards for their vivid posters, Mary Gordon-Smith for her rehearsal sketches and composer Maria Vatenina for her atmospheric music for *Servants*.

I would like to acknowledge the early support of Tess Gorringe, a former director and actor with Unity Theatre, who encouraged my writing for the stage and understood my interest in spirituality in theatre. Her work with me at the South London Theatre in the seventies was invaluable. Likewise, grateful thanks to theatre director Giles Block who came to see my work there on behalf of the National Theatre's script department. Not least, warm retrospective thanks to the late theologian Eric Doyle, D.D., OFM., panellist on *The Big Question* programme on Anglia Television, for memorable discussions on spirituality and the Christian legacy.

Finally, a special thank you to my wife, Lesley, for bearing with me while I researched and worked on the project.

Abstract

This thesis argues that spirituality can be found, identified and categorized in the medium of the dramatic text.

The process of finding involved the creation of a methodology from the self-aware practice of writing two new plays, *The Ruth Ellis Show* and *Servants*, exploring these single-authored texts to uncover new emergent spiritualities and to apply this analytical methodology to the affective scrutiny and evaluation of known and published dramatic texts by T.S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, Edward Bond, Peter Shaffer, Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane.

Vibrant areas of text where spirituality operates in various forms and registers were found, categorized and identified. Nine more categories from the study of the eight very different canonical texts—*Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Lady's Not for Burning*, *Saved*, *Equus*, *Top Girls*, *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis*—were added to the nine original practice findings. The methodology is predicated on the concept of spirituality as the human urge towards transcendence.

Contextualising the research within a multi-faceted approach to spirituality, regarded as appropriate to a study of English drama since 1935, the year of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, the thesis is underpinned by Julia Kristeva's language theories regarding the spiritual, particularly theories of the semiotic subverting the symbolic and affording pluralities of meaning, the creative potentiality of abjection and the musicalisation of language.

Taking note of the historical setting of each dramatic work, including those of practice, an argument is made that the work of the six chosen canonical dramatists, and my own creative practice, provides textual evidence of a post-war social trend in Britain, identified by sociologists Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, that spirituality animated in English drama during this period functions mainly on a non-religious, hybrid spectrum and in doing so extends our understanding of the complexities of dramatic composition.

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Introduction

When a production is done, it's gone forever... yes, you can describe it, you can read hopefully good criticism about it. But the thing itself is gone, and the only thing that remains behind is the Bible. The play. It's what begins and it's what endures.¹

Tony Kushner

It's almost a mystical experience to write a play, to be inspired to do so. It's coming from somewhere that isn't you.²

Jez Butterworth

This thesis argues that spirituality can be found, identified and categorized in the medium of a dramatic text. Recognizing how spirituality can be found in text amounts to a reevaluation of the nature and compositional qualities of a dramatic text. Authorial strategies can be seen to be in place for incorporating spirituality into the structure of a language-based play.

In seeking to establish this case the thesis first sets out to determine the nature of modern spirituality in art and in twentieth century playwriting. In so doing it is recognised that critical advance requires methodological innovation: the elusive spiritual dimension of creative work demands that engagement with its capacities draws on more than diligent textual analysis. Rather it demands a creative adjunct that, in pursuing spiritual playwriting, complements critical acuity with the experienced insights of writing for performance as creative practice-as-research. Only when in harness with creative activity can the application of analytical and conceptual critique be applied to canonical works such as those under scrutiny in the later chapters.

To explore how spirituality is achieved as an embedded feature of an established English playtext, two new plays, written as practice to examine the process by which this incorporation of spirituality happens, give rise to a resulting critical approach which is used to examine and analyse spirituality in eight plays by six canonical playwrights in

¹ John Moore, 'Tony Kushner: the full interview', *The Denver Post*, Running Lines, 30 January, 2017.

² Sarah Crompton, 'Jez Butterworth on life after Jerusalem', *The Telegraph*, Theatre Features (2013) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/10433276/Jez-Butterworth-on-life-after-Jerusalem.html> (para 4 of 4) [accessed 9 November 2013]

the period 1935 to 2000. The six playwrights are T. S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, Edward Bond, Peter Shaffer, Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane. The plays written for the purposes of research are *The Ruth Ellis Show* and *Servants*. In the unfolding process a variety of within-text spiritual representations are observed and interrogated.

An important element in this process is acknowledging the complex relationship between spirituality and religion in dramatic writing. Spirituality in English language-based drama can be traced back to the medieval mystery plays yet, through most of its subsequent history, such drama has not typically taken religion for its matter. Shakespeare had arguably a religious understanding of the universe and yet many of his plays, such as *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure* and *Macbeth* are concerned less with the divine than with keenly human spiritual dilemmas. To some extent this may be the result of the very prevalence of religion: it was not until the modern era that such dominance can be seen as under threat. As is often the case, profound change brings attention to that which previously had been understood as a given. The Victorians made some conventional attempts at religious drama but it was not until the late 1930s, with T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, that English drama presented a markedly new presentation of spirituality rooted in the human and including, and at the same time moving beyond, the Christian.³ Spiritual emphasis can also be seen as a signature of crisis.

Eliot's play, written and produced for the Canterbury Festival in 1935, anticipated the post-war 'spiritual turn' in Britain, recognised by sociologist Grace Davie, by ten years.⁴ A particular period of pre and post-war English drama was chosen to argue how, from 1935 onwards, drama of this period explores an increasingly unchurched spirituality. In mapping this unfolding social development, an historicised aspect to spirituality in text emerged. Playwrights, including myself, were found to respond to the spiritual challenges of their times: the impact of the Second World War, the decline of organised religion, the rise of alternative 'faiths', individualism, secularism and Thatcherism.

Spirituality in the plays examined was found to have recognisable connections with the religious roots of Christianity, but not always, as in the plays of Edward Bond

³Alfred, Lord Tennyson's static and pageant-like treatment of the Becket story in his verse drama *Becket* (1885) can be seen as a precursor to T.S. Eliot's more fluid, visceral and imaginative rendering in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Another, rather different precursor would be G. B. Shaw's *St Joan* (1923).

⁴ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 [1994]).

and Caryl Churchill. For them, the power of society and story functions as a transformational force. The spirituality which emerges from 1935 onward is shown to be markedly different from more conventional presentations of spirituality in the earlier part of the century. As society was fractured by social trauma in the lead up to the second world war so a fracturing of the spiritual impulse began to present itself in contemporary drama. This thesis explores ways playwrights animate this fractured impulse in their work.

I will argue that, as shown by this mirroring, religious spirituality in English drama in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries gives way to a wide-spectrum spirituality. What remains is, at least in the investigated plays, if not a secularised form, then specific, variegated stages of spirituality on the religious model. To help elucidate the nature of the various representations of spirituality, some of them hybrid—that is, a curious mixture of the religious and the secular—the psycho-spiritual findings of psycho-analyst and philosopher Julia Kristeva are harnessed and applied. Kristeva’s approach, rooted in the human and cognizant of the mediating power of language, allows for a searching open-ended yet insightful interpretation of various models of spirituality. In practice, Kristeva’s concepts of Eros and Thanatos, derived from Freud, proved a useful analytical means for recognizing positive and negative presentations of the spiritual in dramatic texts. As she puts it: ‘the plurality of facets reflects the life of the spirit’.⁵ Kristeva’s life-enhancing ideas are, in turn, examined in relation to theologian Kees Waaijman’s multi-faceted approach to spirituality, thereby arguing for an inclusive view encompassing the wide representations of the spiritual to be found in these eight English language-based dramatic texts.⁶ This approach is necessarily complemented by my own exploration of the creative process.

The writing of the two new plays afforded insights into how spirituality inhabits a playtext. The process enabled analysis of the work of the canonical authors, mapping, critiquing and revealing the authorial processes by which discovered and named strategies give rise to relevant areas of text where spirituality may be found to emerge. These relevant areas of text are termed vibrant areas.

⁵ George Nivat, Olivier Mongin, Patsy Baudoin eds., *The Individual Person at the Centre: an Interview with Julia Kristeva*, Los Angeles Review of Books, 19.3.20 <lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-individual-person-at-the-centre-an-interview-with-julia-kristeva/ [accessed 10.1.21]

⁶ Kees Waaijman, ‘Spirituality—a Multifaceted Phenomenon’, *Studies in Spirituality*, 17 (2007), 1-113.

In Chapter One, 'Defining Spirituality' the acknowledged difficulty among academics of reaching a generally-accepted definition of spirituality is explored with the purpose of finding a definition for spirituality in a dramatic text which helps to focus the findings of the present thesis. The definition thus found is period-related and tested against the needs of drama in cited and original texts with its transformational treatment of the human. The definition encompasses the three aspects of spirituality found in the texts—what I categorise as the autonomous (non-religious), the hybrid and Christian-religious modes—as these modes reflect closely the technologized multi-faceted nature of spirituality in dramatic texts from 1935 onwards. Using Julia Kristeva's psycho-spiritual thinking regarding the power of the semiotic as it challenges the symbolic in poetic language and applying her thinking to the wider possibilities of the aesthetics of dramatic language, a compromise is reached, with some awareness of paradox—reconciling the idea of what might be called a secularised spirituality with that of the religious—in presenting a useable definition and categorisation for spirituality as it characterises authorially-induced transformational processes.

In Chapter Two, 'That Dark Fountain': Vibrant Areas as Insights from Practice', authorial strategies giving rise to the creation of vibrant areas of spirituality are explored and categorised in the experiential practice of dramatic writing. A self-aware critical practice interrogating and mapping vibrant areas in original work informs an insightful methodology for assessing and recognising ways spirituality emerges in the texts of other playwrights. Nine manifestations of such strategies are encountered in the writing of the two original plays which amplify and complement those found in the texts of the six cited authors. The repetitive nature of categories throughout *all* the separate works is a noted feature although four entirely new areas not encountered in the established texts—dance, relived memory, incompleteness and rhapsodic language—were discovered in the practice texts. Of necessity, this was a process of experiential writing which required textual reproduction of a single-authored nature. The emphasis here is on a pre-written text for actors and directors to rehearse and perform, with the presence of the embedded vibrant areas known only to the author. Performance provided the opportunity for further elaboration of insights produced through the creative writing process, but should not be confused with the co-authorship of devised work. A watchful process of identification and valorisation underpinned the usefulness of rehearsal and performance. A rapid-response questionnaire with a framed central question⁷ was used to elicit audience responses to spirituality in the

⁷ Appendix 3, Rapid Response Questionnaire, Question, pp. 362-367.

text. The plays can be found in the Appendices along with the Questionnaire. The impact of recognising vibrant textual areas as transmitters of the spiritual in drama not only extends the parameters of our own humanity but has implications for performance and directorial interpretation.

In Chapter Three, 'Re-visioning the Spiritual: T.S.Eliot', the insights gleaned from the creative practice are mobilised to reinterpret T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*.⁸ Eliot's entirely new understanding of the spiritual is interrogated and mapped through the plays indicating how their re-visioning of the spiritual brought a greater depth and sensitivity to the dramatic portrayal of the human experience of spirituality. I argue that Eliot presents an essentially dramatic evocation of spirituality, rooted in the human but with a transcendent and transformative function, and that this can be recognized within certain vibrant textual areas. This rootedness in the human, rather than provoking the religious provenance of the high Anglican tradition which Eliot had come to follow, having been baptised into the church in 1927, deepens and complements it. These areas show the strategies and language games the playwright created to enable his re-visioned concept to emerge in text so that it may be embodied by actors in performance. Julia Kristeva's sense of the power of poetic language to challenge and subvert the status quo elucidates the dynamics of Eliot's verse to critique traditional religious certainty, especially as voiced by the Chorus of the Women of Canterbury.⁹ This re-visioned spirituality, which blurs the boundaries between the secular and the religious, is only more or less recognized in the critical terrain surveyed from 1935 to the present day which has no focus at all on spirituality as a within-text phenomenon. The present study therefore offers a new way of looking at and evaluating a dramatic text, treating it as an entity in itself rather than as merely a blueprint for performance.

In Chapter Four, 'Kinds of Enchantment: Christopher Fry and Edward Bond', commonalities are found in plays by Christopher Fry and Edward Bond showing a keen understanding of the subversive nature of spirituality by harnessing it to a dramatic purpose. Fry and Bond also show dramatically that spirituality may not always present in a positively Eros-oriented register but, in certain settings and under certain circumstances, can present as provokingly oriented towards the negatively thanotic. Their texts show how spirituality emerges in a different register to that of Eliot. Fry's

⁸ T.S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1935); *The Family Reunion* (Faber and Faber Limited, 1939).

⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

poetic exuberance, loquaciousness and élan in *The Lady's Not For Burning* contrasts with Bond's prosaic suppression, economy and circumspection in *Saved*. Both dramatists share a propensity for revealing a subversive spirituality of goodness; conversely both are aware of the dramatic possibilities of the destructive effects of thanotic spirituality. Fry's post-war effusiveness of language in *The Lady's Not For Burning* complements Kristeva's theory of the musicality of language affording a plurality of meanings. On the other hand, Bond's studied economy of words in *Saved* is in tune with her theory of a repression of language in a time of austerity. Coming at the phenomenon of human spirituality from different viewpoints, that of believer and non-believer, both dramatists are shown to present the spirituality (or lack of it) of their characters convincingly in dramatic terms, albeit using different settings, means and techniques. A realization of the spiritual aspect of their plays affords a new appreciation of their meaning: rehabilitating Fry as a playwright of some substance and depth and Bond as more than a cynical and nihilistic purveyor of enhanced social realism.

In Chapter Five, 'Ways of Seeing in the Dark: Peter Shaffer and Caryl Churchill', plays by Peter Shaffer and Caryl Churchill are compared and contrasted for the ways apparent absences of genuine spirituality declare its dramatic presence within the text. If Shaffer's *Equus* is predicated on a corrupted notion of Christian spirituality which leads to the development of a dramatic false spiritual register, recognised in original reviews and criticism and the horrific expression of that in the blinding of six horses by the protagonist Alan Strang, Churchill's strategic marginalisation of spirituality in an Eros-oriented register fuels and powers the protagonist Marlene in her dealings with people and personages in *Top Girls*. Kristeva's notion of the negatively spiritual as an aspect of melancholia—'the depressive woman's perversion is deceitful'—sheds light on the dramatic working out of the spiritual in both plays.¹⁰ In *Top Girls* her concept of 'women's time' affords a lens through which to apprehend the elusive spirituality within the text.¹¹ An apparent absence of the spiritual becomes a motivating force throughout Churchill's work until the power of story in the lives of individuals problematises that absence.

In Chapter Six, 'Opening the Curtains: Sarah Kane', spirituality in plays by Sarah Kane is examined for its elusiveness and carefully managed emergence at climactic

¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p.86.

¹¹ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', trans. by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs*, vol 7, no 1 (Autumn 1981), University of Chicago Press, pp.19/20.

points not only in the dialogue but also in the stage directions. Seemingly random in nature and buried within the text of *Blasted* in the style of Bond, nevertheless effusive linguistic rhythmic passages of an autonomous non-religious spirituality are found within the text, especially in *4.48 Psychosis*, which recall the creativity and joy in language of Fry and Eliot. Kane's spirituality is shown to be submerged in text, as is Bond's, and the chapter uncovers various devices Kane uses to reveal a generally hybrid spirituality inhabiting not only the dramatic language of dialogue but also, organically rather than perversely, the stage directions. Kristeva's assertion that language fractures as an aspect of spiritual stasis and 'nothingness' in depression—'the abyss that, with depressive persons, separates language from affective experience'—is a useful lens through which to observe the broken-ness of the text.¹² The gender aspect of Kane's spirituality is interrogated with reference to the playtexts, her own verbalized thoughts on the subject and the evidence of certain critical views as they support or mitigate against a gender-specific emergence of within-text spirituality.

The 'Conclusion' argues that, as well as changing the academic nature of play-revaluation in the twenty-first century, the recognition of vibrant areas in a dramatic text can be extended to English drama on a greater or lesser scale, depending on the examination of authorial strategy and import. The practice as research element is emphasised as a necessary methodological complement to uncover aspects of playwriting hitherto neglected. The usefulness of the methodology discovered through practice, underpinned by Kristeva's theory of the layered richness of language, is examined for its effectiveness in its application to individual dramatic texts and so make new critical revaluations. It is the writer's proposition that the methodology employed here can be usefully appropriated to detect vibrant areas elsewhere in world drama but also to supply a basic methodology for assessing in-text spirituality in new fields of study. While the specific findings of the thesis are necessarily pertinent only to the historical period under examination, embryonic spirituality may assert itself in the plays of any period: each period must be looked at anew.

Given that spirituality in language-based drama is the focus of this thesis, how is spirituality itself defined? Can the definition of a spirituality locked in a pre-written dramatic text be the same as that for actual everyday living? And must such a definition be entirely dependent on a traditional religious provenance? Or has the definition to be more expansive, finely-tuned and variegated, reconciling secularised

¹² Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p.54.

and religious models as might be found in the technology of a contemporary dramatic text? These questions are explored in the next chapter.

Chapter One

Defining Spirituality

There is a sense of spirituality in theatre: it's a medium you could use to talk about spirituality, about spiritual quests.¹

Robert Lepage

The plurality of facets reflects the life of the spirit.²

Julia Kristeva

Spirituality is a complex and elusive concept. A central paradox is that it can be understood as existing within the domain of the human and, at the same time, suggests something quintessentially transcendent. Traditionally, spirituality possesses not only the hopeful quality of 'rising above things' but also of 'transcending normal or physical experience' entirely and reaching towards an Absolute.³ There is a critical divide in our increasingly secular context between those who, like philosopher André Comte-Sponville,⁴ see it as a human, non-religious phenomenon and those who, like theologian Kees Waaijman, while recognising the wide spectrum of its manifestations, see it most vitally in terms of a religious impulse.⁵ Comte-Sponville, in positing an entirely human basis for spirituality, finds arguments which eliminate spirituality as a religious phenomenon or as an encounter with divine grace. He argues, 'To be an atheist is not to deny the existence of the absolute; rather it is to deny its transcendence, its spirituality, its personality.'⁶ The insufficiency of Comte-Sponville's approach is that it dismisses well-documented human experience of the ineffable and, as a consequence, devalues much in the humanities which has provided centuries of

¹ Maria M. Delgado and Paul Heritage eds., *In Contact with the Gods: Directors Talk Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.144.

² George Nivat, Olivier Mongin, Patsy Baudoin eds., *The Individual Person at the Centre: an Interview with Julia Kristeva*, Los Angeles Review of Books, 19.3.20. <lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-individual-person-at-the-centre-an-interview-with-julia-kristeva/ [accessed 10.1.21]

³ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford Dictionary, Eleventh Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.1530.

⁴ André Comte-Sponville, *A Book of Atheist Spirituality*, trans. by Nancy Huston (London: Bantam Books, [2008] 2009).

⁵ Kees Waaijman, 'Spirituality—a Multi-Faceted Phenomenon', *Studies in Spirituality*, 17, (2007).

⁶ André Comte-Sponville, *The Book of Atheist Spirituality*, p.136-137.

accumulated evidence. In contrast, Waaijman foregrounds spirituality traditionally as a response to an Absolute and an expression of faith in God, albeit one evolving into the multi-faceted nature of contemporary understanding.

Such a critical divide, interesting in itself, also suggests areas of common ground, ground which might be apprehended in contemporary playwriting. Spirituality has also always been associated with scripture, that writerly transmission of the apparently divine which offers itself both as a medium and as a common, embodied grounding for spiritual engagement. From a more secular viewpoint, Art—particularly the written word—presents a category of expression which can distil the urge for transcendence, religious or not. 'Or not' necessarily returns us to a paradox that may be usefully explored in the company of Julia Kristeva, a thinker who engages with the uncertain space between desire and form. As we shall see, the dramatic text has a particular place in this discourse.

Fundamentals and Paradoxes

Waaijman's essentially theological view of spirituality is expressed in his opening sentence: 'Spirituality as we have defined it touches the core of our human existence: our relation to the Absolute.'⁷ For him, the Absolute has several names: the One; Grace; Enlightenment; Deliverance. It is a view that may be taken as representative of the long tradition, enduring beyond secular developments. The theologian's survey maintains an emphasis on spirituality's rootedness in divine-human experience despite a recognition of other forms of spirituality—feminist, environmental, new-age—categorizing such alternatives pejoratively as 'counter movements' to religious spirituality.⁸ Given the diverse subject matter of contemporary drama, such a view need not be abandoned as part of the critical apparatus for finding spirituality in a dramatic text but is more appropriately subsumed within the theoretical underpinning of the methodological process. Religious or not, it is precisely the in-between, paradoxical nature of the spirit and its relation to embodied physical life that may offer a key to finding its relation to dramatic text.

Philip Sheldrake, as does Waaijman, in his earlier Christo-centric study *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (2002), acknowledges the broad inclusive meaning of spirituality in a contemporary context.⁹ According to Philip Sheldrake, the

⁷ Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality, Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), p.1.

⁸ Kees Waaijman, p. 214.

⁹ Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

origin of the word spirituality is in the Latin noun *spiritualitas* which is associated with the word *spiritualis* (spiritual). For Sheldrake this is a derivation of the earlier Greek word *pneuma*, spirit, and the adjective *pneumatikos*. Looking at spirituality from a Christian theological perspective, Sheldrake observes that the terms spirit and spiritual are not the opposite of physical or material (Greek *soma*, Latin *corpus*) but of flesh (Greek *sarx*, Latin *caro*).¹⁰ This observation is useful in understanding how spirituality can notionally inhabit the physical nature of artistic form, animate it, deepen its sense of inhabited aliveness, be located and embodied in these works—especially, for the purpose of this thesis, dramatic texts. It might be observed, too, that such questions of form offer a way into the complexities of religious and autonomous forms of spirituality, the latter being those aspects of the spiritual that are acknowledged as non-religious but no less significant. Finding a way to talk about spirituality in relation to playscripts might take into account Sheldrake's five aspects of spirituality: the holistic, the sacred, the quest for meaning, personal development and the quest for ultimate values. None of these has anything exclusively to do with religion but overlaps with it, and with ethics and with moral vision. Spirituality becomes 'an alternative way of exploring the deepest self and the ultimate purpose of life'.¹¹ This basic definition works well when applied to the unfolding nature of contemporary drama but it leaves out an irreducible aspect: a recognition of the ineffable.

Such traditional ideas of the spiritual are closely linked to critical traditions that have their own roots in a long history of biblical study and commentary on scripture. Academic theological studies have long found evidence of spirituality in written texts and an entire industry has been built on this. Notable studies in this area have been done on the poems and writings of St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Avila and the writings of Teilhard de Chardin. Notwithstanding that it is a Christian spirituality which is identified and found in these devotional texts, the affective principle of looking, observing, identifying and understanding the way a medium is used in artistic creation may be adopted for evaluating spirituality in a range of artistic media that connects to more inclusive and open research parameters.

Approaching a discussion of a dramatic text through only one known aspect of spirituality, the non-religious or the religious, has its limits when applied to contemporary texts with their subtle shades of the spiritual in a post-war world. Language itself emerges as a means of understanding the function of spirituality in a

¹⁰ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality, A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), p.2.

¹¹ Sheldrake, p.5.

dramatic text. The language theories of psychoanalyst and philosopher Julia Kristeva provide a key to unpacking the subtle spiritualities at work in a dramatic text and, by assuaging the tensions between the non-religious and the religious, manages a conceptual reconciliation.

Art as a Conveyor of Human Dignity and Hope

An awareness of non-religious spirituality is not the lone preserve of a secularised world-view. Catholic hermit Sister Wendy Beckett, in her *Joy Lasts: On the Spiritual in Art* (2006), makes a clear-eyed distinction between the spiritual and the religious when evaluating art: 'The terms *religious* and *spiritual* are often used indistinguishably. But they have very different meanings.'¹² For Beckett, spirituality has a natural source in the human and this naturalness may be embodied in art. In discussing Cézanne's *Still life with Apples* (1894), she says: 'In calling this painting spiritual, I am not making the slightest religious claim for it. This is pure image, moving us to our depths with its beauty and integrity, its passion for truth, its sense of wonder.'¹³ For her, 'To be religious, a work of art must depict religious images'.¹⁴ The difference is not so much a difference of the artwork's endemic power or impact as much as its category. Yet 'the higher honour is always accorded to *spiritual* and to it all works of art aspire: it is what we have in mind when we call a work of art great.'¹⁵ Admitting that she always has difficulty in talking about the religious in art (worried she may come across as proselytizing) she makes the interesting observation that she prefers to write about secular art 'where there is spiritual depth enough without raising other difficulties'.¹⁶

In finding the spiritual represented by 'pure image' in fine art Beckett distinguishes it from the religious. I suggest a similar approach can be taken towards a spirituality which presents as non-religious in dramatic writing.

The creative dimension of spiritual investigation has long been a dimension of artistic criticism, if not of dramatic criticism. Wassily Kandinsky shares a non-religious interpretation of spirituality in his influential *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.¹⁷ Kandinsky

¹² Sister Wendy Beckett, *Joy Lasts: On the Spiritual in Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), pp. 1-2.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 23.

¹⁷ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1914)

identifies three practical elements making up the process of a spiritual movement in 'the new theatre': 'musical movement, pictorial movement and physical movement.'¹⁸ Identifying spirituality with a sense of inner harmony in performance, Kandinsky touches upon the importance of musicality and patterning in a written text as a means of evoking the spiritual and, consequently, the possibility of spirituality being evoked in the performance of text on stage via pictorial and physical representation. For Kristeva, musicality in language, far from limiting or diluting its meaning, only serves to pluralise the possible meanings which may emerge.¹⁹ Such musicality evoking spiritual moments in text can be identified in passages most clearly in Eliot, Fry, Shaffer and Kane, more minimally in Bond and Churchill.

Following Kandinsky and Beckett, an alternative to the spirituality associated with religious models of the spiritual—given to properties both physical and 'musical'—can be termed autonomous because it suggests a spirituality detached from religious concerns (excluding any connotations of the oriental, obscurantism, or theosophy), the foregrounding of a spirituality which, while manifesting as a dynamic urge towards transcendence, is also rooted in the human and complicated by a panoply of human drives and emotions. If not oriented to the Absolute, it offers 'image', 'harmony' and 'musicality' as new dimensions of possibility. In a positive, Eros-oriented register, it can be considered to move with a forward movement towards qualities such as love and concern. It also therefore denotes a paradoxical non-religious aspiration to move above the confines of our reality. As Kristeva declares, 'transcendence is what make us go beyond our limits and the limits of every social framework'.²⁰

Reconciling the Paradox through Kristevan Theory

The problematics of what might be considered post-religious spirituality has provided some of the more productive analysis of the human condition. Depth psychologists such as Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud situated discussion of spirituality within the context of religion while, more usefully, Kristeva offers new alternatives. The debate is not cut and dried. Kristeva is at pains to defend Freud's view that 'religious ideas [...] are illusions— fulfillments of the oldest, strongest and most fervent wishes of

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 38.

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, [1974]1984), p.65.

²⁰ Doude van Trootswijk, Chris and Matthew Clemente eds., qtd in *Richard Kearney's Anatheistic Wager* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), p.86.

humanity'.²¹ At the same time Kristeva argues that Freud is emphasising the longevity of the religious impulse in his *The Future of an Illusion*, not limiting its scope²². This is to seek to reconcile to some extent his position to Jung's more sympathetic view which theorized the religious impulse as 'a profound experience of the psyche' that was inborn.²³ In their schism one might detect the move from simply secular to agnostically spiritual. For Anthony Padovan, Freud is 'deficient in his ability to account for religious affirmations which follow upon critical thinking and which lead to the enormous creativity religion inspires. Positive consequences of religious affirmation include art, music, architecture, poetry, the moral system and learning, compassion, social justice and personal development'.²⁴ Freud's urge to usher in a new rationalism, finding the source of religious belief in infantile dependence, was denied by Jung who resisted this inclination. For Jung, spirituality was properly bound up with an authentic human search for meaning as an evolving transformation and expression of the self. Post Freud and Jung, Kristeva maintains an open-mindedness to the rich possibilities of language channelling human spiritual experience.²⁵

The problematics of talking about the tensions between the concepts of non-religious spirituality and religious spirituality in contemporary dramatic texts can be reconciled through applying Julia Kristeva's psycho-analytic insights into the human condition and, particularly, the insights within her theory of language. This is not to argue for the ultimate stand-alone truths of Kristevan theory but, because her theory is grounded in the human, to use it as a lens through which spirituality in a text may be apprehended. Like Comte-Sponville, Kristeva is a confirmed atheist but her plurality of vision, rather than narrowing the focus on an exclusively secular spirituality, broadens the range of the concept, offering other possibilities. She may be ambivalent in her defence of Freud's reductive views on religion, on the one hand arguing that Freud is emphasising the longevity of the religious impulse in his *The Future of an Illusion* and, on the other, reminding us that Freud himself was 'the most unbelieving, the most

²¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. by W. D. Robson Scott (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927), p.37.

²² Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p.4.

²³ Interview with Mircea Eliade (1952) *Carl Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), pp. 229-30.

²⁴ Anthony T. Padovan, 'Defining Religion, Spirituality and Human Experience', *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table*, Summer 2007 <<http://forumonpublicpolicy.com/archivesum07/padavano.pdf> > [accessed 4.2.2015]

²⁵ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, pp. 20-21.

irreligious human ever to live'.²⁶ Yet Kristeva's sense of the layeredness of human life as it emerges within the creativity of language provides some very wide parameters within which to consider the spiritual landscape of texts—particularly playtexts. For her, spirituality is a body-centred phenomenon, expressive of the singularity of that person, a 'transcendence incarnated in my capacity as a human being to speak and to love'.²⁷

The concept of singularity has a special relevance when considering the layered contents of single-authored texts. Kristeva takes from theologian Duns Scotus (1265-1308) his concept of *haecceitas*, 'thisness', to support her concept of singularity, arguing that within human singularity is a panoply of human drives which cannot be reduced and which generate the capacity for spiritual expression.²⁸ 'Individual persons are multiverses' she argues in clarifying the richness of the singular although careful to point out that she would not necessarily apply this concept to fictional character creation in a novel.²⁹ A similar concept of singularity is found in the work of the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'What I do is me: for that I came.'³⁰ Pace Kristeva, I argue that character creation in playwriting, if finely and intensely-drawn in the medium of dramatic language, may be many-layered and, because written to be performed [as a mediation of self and other] the process is conducive to the emergence of spirituality in text. This rich potentiality, if accessed in drama, takes us beyond—transcends—the biological and makes us truly human. Furthermore, the process of dramatic composition has a way of intensifying and positioning spirituality in its relativity to the dramatist's purpose. An appropriate definition of spirituality needs to suggest the varied modes and registers in which spirituality is likely to emerge in text. As speaking and loving are universally evident in dramatic texts, her concept is useful to describe the way playwrights manage the human expression of character and its trajectories. That is, the way a dramatic individual character is engineered to respond to various dramatic situations often discloses the spiritual. As Kristeva says, 'Truth is not in the

²⁶ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, [2006] 2009), p. 14.

²⁷ Julia Kristeva interviewed in *Richard Kearney's Anatheistic Wager*, ed. by Chris Doude Van Trootswijk and Matthew Clemente (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), p.86.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 95.

²⁹ George Nivat, Olivier Mongin, Patsy Baudoin eds., *The Individual Person at the Centre: An Interview with Julia Kristeva*.

³⁰ Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame' in *The Major Works* ed. by Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1986]), p. 129.

universal idea, nor in opaque matter, but in ‘this one’, this man there, this woman here.’³¹

As a theoretical underpinning, Kristevan insights can be matched purposefully against the broad-spectrum survey of theologian Waaijman.³² Kristevan language theories can be usefully employed to theorise, reconcile and spotlight the authorially-evoked and reconstituted spiritualities found in dramatic texts. Kristeva sees language as ‘the material of thought’³³, ‘inscribed upon on a void’³⁴, but a void able to divulge surprisingly articulate energies in creative circumstances. According to Kristeva the aim of psychoanalysis is ‘the resurrection of the imagination’ and this constitutes its healing power.³⁵ The act of playwriting itself may produce a similar resurrection of the imagination with its deployment of imagery and dynamic compositional devices which ‘opens up as yet undefined possibilities’.³⁶ Kristeva does not prescribe what these possibilities may be—they are ‘undefined’—but the openness of her parameters allows for the emergence of the spiritual as among those possibilities.

A Methodology of Finding and Naming

In attempting to characterise the range of spirituality acknowledged by Waaijman and Kristeva, the primary modes of spirituality in text found through practice have been categorised as: the autonomous (non-religious), the hybrid (spirituality with the combined elements of the religious and the non-religiously autonomous) and the Christian-religious (the religious aspect found to be Christian in this study), while secondary registers are presented in Kristevan terms as either Eros or Thanatos-oriented. The former three are the fundamental types of human spirituality found in a dramatic text. Finding these modes anchors the research within the phenomenon of the human. The latter two indicate the registers each type— autonomous, the hybrid, the Christian-religious—may operate in or, occasionally, within in a mixture of the two. In a dramatic work these registers characterise the creative intentions and strategies of the author, the kind of play being written, and what might be achieved in performance.

³¹ Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 95.

³² Kees Waaijman, ‘Spirituality—a Multi-Faceted Phenomenon’, *Studies in Spirituality*, 17 (2007), 1-113.

³³ Julia Kristeva, *Language, the Unknown: an Invitation into Linguistics*, trans. by Anne M. Menke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 6.

³⁴ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 34.

³⁵ Kristeva, p.18.

³⁶ Kristeva, p.27.

Spirituality in an Eros-oriented register presents in a positive and constructive aspect whereas that in a Thanatos-oriented register in a negative and destructive aspect. Eros, the life-drive, originally explored and named by Sigmund Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and hence by Kristeva, after the god of desire in Greek mythology, and Thanatos, the death-drive, after the Greek personification of death, evoke not only the locomotive energies within authored texts but also tones of spiritual emergence. Furthermore, for Kristeva, the nuanced erotic has a wide range of meaning, inclusive of goodness and care,³⁷ enjoying 'a Platonic side which ascends to the Ideal', whereas the nuanced thanotic can, according to Freud, include within its destructive action, an urge 'towards the restoration of an earlier state of things'.³⁸ Spirituality emerging in a Thanatos-oriented register may demonstrate, in Kristevan terms, a situation where 'the death drive alone triumphs' [embodying] 'the malignancy of evil'.³⁹ That spirituality in drama can function in these alternate registers queries Donnalee Dox's simplistic view that 'spirituality can be understood as a quality (the sacred) and described in terms of theatrical representation'.⁴⁰ In drama, a demonic version of the spiritual, the reverse of the sacred, may be vividly represented. Plays inhabiting a scenario of effervescence and hopefulness such as Christopher Fry's *The Lady's not for Burning* are found to animate the Eros-oriented category of the sacred whereas plays inhabiting a scenario of abjection and violence such as Peter Shaffer's *Equus* are found to animate the thanotic.

To arrange religious and non-religious spirituality as dialectically productive, and apparent in hybrid as well as emerging in contrasting registers, allows for a conceptual mobilisation of a spectrum of spirituality beyond the Christian, a spectrum to be found in the texts of not only the practice works but also in the texts of the six canonical dramatists. This spectrum, functioning at the deepest level of the human, colours the text of the dramatists as a kind of spiritual vernacular, what Kristeva might refer to as expressions of *chora*, the authentic ground-rock of the stratified human spirit which 'precedes and underlies figuration' on a day-to-day basis.⁴¹ This kind of spirituality may be found, I argue, as a basic *lingua franca* or leitmotif throughout much dramatic

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans, by Ross Gubermann (New York: Columbia University Press, [1993] 1995), p.173.

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* trans, by James Strachey (New York, Dover Publications, [1920] 2015), p.31.

³⁹ Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, p.111.

⁴⁰ Donnalee Dox, *Reckoning with Spirit in the Paradigm of Performance*, p. 34.

⁴¹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 26.

writing since 1935. Grounded in and emanating from the profoundly human, its recognition demanded a correlative engagement in practice-as-research.

Spirituality is found to present itself dramaturgically and minimally in Christian-religious mode at strategic points in Eliot's otherwise hybrid work, presenting itself as an achieved theatrical moment towards the end of a play as in *Murder in the Cathedral*. The religiously Christian mode being a spirituality which, as both Sr Wendy Beckett and Julia Kristeva assert, reaches towards an Absolute. Christian spirituality may be signalled metaphorically and embryonically in Sarah Kane's work, again at climactic points toward the end of a play, as in *Blasted*, and often prefigured obliquely in her stage directions. Spirituality does not present itself in Christian mode at all in Bond's *Saved* but its autonomous presence in the character of Len is vividly expressed; whereas there are significant moments where spirituality emerges in hybrid forms in Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning*. Nor does spirituality present itself in genuine Christian mode in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (in any orthodox sense) but there are twisted thanotic manifestations of Christian-religious spirituality in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*.

Historicising the Spiritual

As such observations indicate, the search for the spiritual cannot be abstracted from the physical world. What makes spirituality human also makes spirituality a historical phenomenon. Indeed, the crisis in categorising spirituality is symptomatic of a process by which spirituality is modernised along with the society which produces it. Grace Davie's seminal *Religion in Britain since 1945* describes a shift in religious belief and practice towards the autonomously spiritual, eschewing religious expression and the identification of spirituality with religion.⁴² Davie finds a vibrant unchurched spirituality which she still calls religiosity when she clearly indicates a drift away from that. This unchurched spirituality does not mark a turning towards other religions but signals a subjective turn towards an expression of the non-religiously spiritual within the individual. After the second world war '[society] increasingly recognised that the whole person included some sort of spirit, together with mind and body'.⁴³ In post-war Britain a new model of the human was recognised: spirituality could no longer be identified only with religion.

⁴² Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.40.

Davie found that, after the war, spirituality presented in different forms, from being an integral feature of the grand narratives of organized faiths, towards a pervasive self-questioning as society became more secularised. Ironically, secularisation opened up new opportunities for discussion in some quarters. Sociology recognized this new model and so did dramatists—instinctively in the way they animated spirit in the text— but criticism has lagged well behind. Davie identifies this development as a post-modern phenomenon.⁴⁴ Positing that a resurgence of interest in spirituality was a late twentieth century turn, ushered in by the alternative New Age movement, which she describes as a religion, Davie is also the first sociologist to acknowledge and validate the findings and research of the Oxford-based Alister Hardy Research Centre: ‘the growing body of data in this important area of research (into spirituality and spiritual experience) provides convincing evidence of a persistent—if partially hidden—phenomena of contemporary society.’⁴⁵

Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, in identifying a ‘subjective turn’⁴⁶ in the nature of spirituality in the late twentieth century, built on the insights of Davie and afforded a more productive way of recognizing spirituality, one that offers new avenues for development of the spiritual as an aspect of dramatic writing. The new subjective turn represents, for them, a move away from adherence or belonging to a religion or a church group and a turning inwards to the discovery and valorization of inner experience: ‘With ever increasing numbers of people having come to value what subjective life has to offer, the tendency is for forms of associational activity that locate the sacred within to be doing well. For when the sacred, or spirituality, is experienced as lying at the heart of who you are, as coming from ‘You’ (not least by way of relationships) it can hardly dictate or constrain who you are. How can spirituality impose a life on you when it is experienced to be your true life?’⁴⁷ This view, also promulgated more recently by Ivan Varga, has a particular usefulness in understanding the spirituality in characters in plays written from 1935 onwards in Britain since the phenomenon they describe is a late twentieth century one, possibly occasioned by the anticipation and then unsettling impact of the Second World War. The 1930s marked a period of increasing austerity, with the approach of war. The austerity was followed, in turn, by the globally destructive effect of the Second World War, and the colossal impact on British society with shortage of food, rationing,

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 192-202.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 83.

⁴⁶ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is giving way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) pp. 2-5.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 125-6.

dessication of family life, and the ongoing task of shoring up survival with the rebuilding of cities and the frustrated reframing of social hierarchies and civilian responsibilities. Concomittant with all this, the consequent need for entertainment and 'escapism'.⁴⁸ If collective basic spiritual needs were being met or sublimated in this increasingly secular society by the rise of popular music, packed dance halls, endless cinema queues, and sold-out theatre performances, how were these needs (and others) animated in post-war playwriting? And how do we understand them?

As Varga says: 'spirituality has an increasingly important place in people's lives [...] because in modernity or postmodernity the individual is increasingly de-rooted, that is, deprived of the traditional cultural significant; the individual is—to paraphrase Sartre—'thrown into choice', and collective memory is becoming ever more fragmented.'⁴⁹ Elements of this mid-century de-rooted subjective turn and the resultant dilemma of choosing can be observed and historicised in the plays of Eliot, Fry, Bond, Shaffer, Churchill and Kane, as if the plays themselves provide a parallel narrative of the shifting societal change which sociologists such as Davie, Heelas, Woodhead, and Varga, observe.

In tandem with Kristeva's reconciling theories, is the evidence of the plays themselves which appear to reflect the changing nature of spirituality in British society since 1935. Historical change seems to manifest itself in dramatic writing which, since 1935, does not readily admit the presence of a traditionally-defined spirituality. Playrights animate the spiritual in other modes and registers.

This is to acknowledge and theorise the multiple and various spiritualities discovered at large in dramatic texts since 1935. Waaijman notices a remarkable sea-change in the way academics have talked about spirituality since the last war. Despite the 'chaotic centrifugality' of approaches which he observes, there is no central focus.⁵⁰ According to Donnalee Dox, referring to the context of drama, 'the study of vernacular spirituality remains untheorised'.⁵¹

The expression of Christian-religious spirituality in the play will be shown to be minimal. *Murder in the Cathedral* also predates Davie's identification of a 'spiritual turn'

⁴⁸ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p.94.

⁴⁹ Ivan Varga, 'Georg Simmel: Religion and Spirituality' in *A Sociology of Spirituality* ed. by Flangan and Jupp, pp. 145-60 (p.146).

⁵⁰ Waaijman, p. 103.

⁵¹ Donnalee Dox, *Reckoning with Spirit in the Paradigm of Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), p.199.

in Britain by ten years. What Davie recognised retrospectively and sociologically in 1994, Eliot as dramatist knew intuitively in 1935. Eliot's play can also be seen as sensible to the crisis of European culture that had begun in the First World War and culminated in the Second. His indifferent, malign Knights and their rationalistic justifications of slaughter, forecast the banal rationalisations of the mass murderers at the Nuremberg trials. All of which seems to suggest that the spirituality to be found in dramatic texts since 1935 attends to implications of an aversion by dramatists to evocations of religious spirituality. The issue Eliot raises is perhaps whether turning to the expression of autonomous post-Christian spirituality, with its roots in the human, can offer anything more substantial or relevant. However, bracketing out discussion of the ineffable presents a problem when analysing spirituality in a play like T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

If spirituality is 'an alternative way of exploring the deepest self', that is, the nature of the self is revealed within certain dramatic circumstances, we see clearly, during this post-war period, striking, minimal moments of non-religious spirituality emerging in such plays as Terence Rattigan's *Separate Tables* (1954), in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), and in Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958). In *Separate Tables* when, at the close of the play *Table Number Seven*, Sibyl quietly defies her domineering mother's orders to follow her—'No, Mummy. I'm going to stay in the dining room, and finish my dinner.'—the defiance, in its context, may be understood and perceived as the beginning of a brave new spiritual growth.⁵² In *Look Back in Anger* when Alison and Jimmy reconcile at the close of the play, a scene which may be dismissed as sentimental reveals itself as profoundly hopeful if the images of bears and squirrels are interpreted as signs of embryonic spiritualities, a promise of new beginnings.⁵³ In *A Taste of Honey* when Jo, in a carefully-positioned stretch of dialogue by Delaney, exclaims 'I really do live at the same time as myself, don't I?' the heartfelt question may be understood as transmitting an impassioned and new-found autonomous spiritual awareness.⁵⁴

These three post-war examples concern love for others or love for self and point forward to future personal development beyond the play itself. In each example characters are exploring aspects of their deepest selves and, possibly, the ultimate purposes of their lives. The glimpse of autonomous spirituality in these brief extracts features a quality which Sheldrake later describes as 'aspirational', pointing to 'the

⁵² Terence Rattigan, *Plays Two* (London: Methuen Drama, 1985 [1941]), p.168.

⁵³ John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (London Faber and Faber: 1966 [1967]), p. 96.

⁵⁴ Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* (London: Methuen Drama 1993 [1959]), p.70.

ways our human spirit is to achieve its fullest potential.⁵⁵ Essentially dramatic, they are carefully-achieved moments of in-text spirituality evoked by the compositional devices of the author. Further striking but more sustained, orchestrated and variegated moments can be examined in other single-authored playtexts, each representing a section of the austere repressive post-war period. Perhaps there is something in the fragmenting social structures of post-war British society which allowed playwrights such as Rattigan, Osborne and Delaney to portray these minor, fleeting non-religious spiritual triumphs. Moreover, the plays of Eliot, Fry, Bond, Churchill, Shaffer and Kane, examined in Chapters Three to Six, show a more substantial and sustained multi-faceted evocation of the spiritual, albeit in ways idiosyncratic to their authors and not entirely dependent on carefully-delineated social backgrounds.

Art often has an intuitive, anticipatory aspect in evoking social trends long before they are seen to happen. Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965) and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) bear witness to this in that they anticipate not only societal dysfunction and breakdown in Britain from the sixties onwards but also the more societally-invasive destructiveness of the twenty-first century.

In contemporary drama such transcendence can be observed, as a locomotive drive within the playwriting structure, to convey human dignity and hope, either through the finished piece or in the reception of it, as Adrienne Rich argues is the proper function of art.⁵⁶ As Kristeva implies, spirituality encompasses a full range of transcendent human drives. While not abandoning the traditional characteristic of spirituality as religious—reaching for an Absolute—recognition of the autonomous non-religious expression of this urge towards transcendence is due.

For Kristeva, spirituality, what she simply calls 'the spirit', is a component of the deepest humanity and an essential drive within the speaking human being. The spirit often arises out of abjection, from conflict situations, as an embryonic, often impassioned, manifestation of the spiritual. Or it may come to the fore in all urgency in adolescence, helping the individual contest the demands of life with 'a high-risk ideality'.⁵⁷ All these ideas are useful for apprehending the full range of the working of

⁵⁵ Susie Hayward and Philip Sheldrake, 'Safeguarding with compassion', *The Tablet*, 1 February 2020, p.9.

⁵⁶ Adrienne Rich, *Arts of the Possible* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), p.99.

⁵⁷ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p.19.

the spiritual in dramatic texts, with an acceptance rather than a denigration of the religious impulse.

Dramatic Language: Holder, Carrier and Transmitter

Kristeva shows a generously open view of the spiritual capacities of language while at the same time, in stating that 'Psychoanalysis is not a substitute for religion', declares the limits of psychoanalytical theory.⁵⁸ Her view of the ineffable may be rooted in a Freudian concept of the sacred, with its taboo aspects, but not constrained by it. A limitation might be the conundrum (in her thinking) that belief in an Absolute presents as essentially an adolescent phenomenon but such thinking does not invalidate the spirituality driving it: 'all of us are adolescents when we are passionate about the Absolute.'⁵⁹ Such a stance is useful in categorising presentations of spirituality in dramatic texts since 1935 since many characters do exhibit adolescent traits in behaviour e.g. Christopher Fry's Thomas Mendip, Peter Shaffer's Alan Strang. Others less so e.g. T. S. Eliot's Chorus of Women of Canterbury, Caryl Churchill's Marlene, Edward Bond's Len, Sarah Kane's protagonist in *4.48 Psychosis*. But the Kristevan theory of 'revolt as sacred space' intimates a spirituality that may function as a subversive force against the *status quo*.⁶⁰ Such a view is illuminating when applied to Fry's coruscating poetic language for Jennett Jourdemayne in *The Lady's Not for Burning*. Adroitly, Kristeva's 'adolescent' placement also neatly evokes the vulnerability of the human soul before something deemed cosmic and greater than itself. There are overtones of a Nietzschean reaching for the impossible in human behaviour. Yet Kristeva's placement of spirituality as an adolescent drive paradoxically complements the vision of Matthew's gospel that 'unless you become like little children again, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven'.⁶¹ All of which makes Kristeva's theory of 'post-Christian humanism' particularly apt for assessing spirituality in contemporary dramatic texts.⁶²

⁵⁸ George Nivat, Olivier Mongin, Patsy Baudoin, eds., *The Individual Person at the Centre: An Interview with Julia Kristeva*.

⁵⁹ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p.14.

⁶⁰ Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, trans. by Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 30.

⁶¹ *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 18.3., trans. by Ronald Knox (London: Burns & Oates, 1963 [1955]), p.18.

⁶² Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, p.93.

For Kristeva, 'the plurality of facets reflects the life of the spirit'.⁶³ Playscripts can be seen as holding and embodying that plurality so as to make theatre a remarkably potent means for the transmission of the spiritual. What is more, Kristeva assures us that 'poetic language reminds us of its eternal function: to introduce through the symbolic that which works on, moves through and threatens it.'⁶⁴ This is not to overlook the fact that poetic language can be a composite of prose in drama, retaining the same potency and signification. Poetry and prose: literary mediums well-used to configure dramatic texts and, according to Kristeva, 'the ultimate means of [the social order's] transformation or subversion.'⁶⁵ Hence my decision to write a verse play as practice-as-research with iambic pentameter as the language construct through which to observe the emergence of the spiritual. The implication here is that spirituality in language can transform or subvert. Such language has a potential for impact in dramatic terms if discharged within a theatrical space.

Descriptors like autonomous, hybrid, Christian-religious fit in well with Kristevan theory as the spirituality being found in contemporary texts is variegated and dependent on the singularity of vision of the playwright who channels or manipulates the drives, 'which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks', articulating a non-expressive *chora* which is 'as full of movement as it is regulated'.⁶⁶ A contemporary playtext, researching first through the process of practice, can be seen therefore as a live continuum of internal energies and the spirituality a movement from the *chora*, or fount of creativity, which may present in either an Eros-oriented or a Thanatos-oriented register. In this way spirituality in the plays studied becomes either transformational or subversive and sometimes both at once.

Defining the Spiritual through Vibrant Areas

Such views attend a search for the spiritual, which, as noted above, construes the non-religious as that domain that transcends the human and yet it is constitutive of humanity, is materialist and yet cosmic in reach. In dramatic writing, such autonomous spirituality is foremostly an animation of the kinaesthetic movement of plot and character, the creation of transmissive imagery and, in its erotic register, the characterisation of the human experience of love, joy and compassion.

⁶³ George Nivat, Olivier Monguin and Patsy Baudoin, eds., *The Individual Person at the Centre: An Interview with Julia Kristeva*.

⁶⁴ Julia, Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 81.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.81.

⁶⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.25.

Such autonomous transcendence is indicated by Jane Bennett who, like many post-modern academics wanting to find an enchantment in contemporary life which seemed to have been banished by the earlier 'calculable world'⁶⁷ of Max Weber, notes a relational vibrancy in matter itself, especially created matter. This sense of enchantment with matter might involve 'a surprising encounter, a meeting with something that you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage' with an 'overall effect of a sense of having had one's nerves or circulation or concentration powers tuned up or recharged.'⁶⁸ Such an aperçu could be seen as the reverse of Sartre's nausea: 'Then the park smiled at me. I leaned against the gate and looked at the park for a long time. The smile of the trees, of the clump of laurel bushes, meant something; this was the real secret of existence.'⁶⁹ Sartre's protagonist, Antoine Roquentin, was annoyed by this momentary sense of transcendence: it complicated the freedom of his nihilism.

Finding enchantment in matter suggests layered depths to be discovered, that all is not what it seems and that there are rich possibilities in our lives for transformation. Dramatic writing has a rich potential for the discovery of such layered depths and, in particular, 'surprising encounters' and 'meetings with something that you did not expect'. A facet of these surprising encounters is found, I will argue, in the way dramatists animate spirituality in text. Moreover, finding possibilities for transformation in language raises questions of agency and perception.

Using a methodology developed from mapping the process of spiritual emergence in text from writing two new works *The Ruth Ellis Show* and *Servants*, brought to light the possibly limitless scope of spiritual emergence and its repetitive, iconic nature. The principal finding was that spirituality emerges in these post-war texts incrementally and in particular segments or sequences.

Spirituality in a dramatic text is not confined to simplistic manifestations on a non-religious spiritual/religious continuum but, through the transforming power of the creative imagination, emerges in text, as argued, in a variety of modes and registers.

⁶⁷ Max Weber, *From Max Weber Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford, 1981), p 139. Weber saw the shortcomings of the limiting concept of a calculable world which excluded the mysterious. Although for him the world was disenchanted, the reclamation of enchantment might be an antidote to modern social malaise.

⁶⁸ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 5.

⁶⁹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. by Robert Baldick (London: Penguin Books, 1965, [1938]), p.193.

Language strategies and games entered into during the creative process facilitate its emergence. As such, spirituality in a dramatic text is at one remove from spirituality in lived experience because of its transformed and technologized nature. Such reconstituted multi-faceted spirituality, reconciled as viable through Kristevan theory and historically present in the examined texts, can be found in certain authorially-inscribed *vibrant areas*, the discovery of which in practice is explored and mapped in the next chapter.

Kristevan theory supports these findings which are dependent on an awareness of the implicit power and genius of dramatic language by helping to reconcile conflicting notions of the spiritual as put forward by contemporary philosophy and theology. Moreover, Kristevan theory supports the view that a playscript may not be simply a blueprint for performance but a literary artefact with hidden energies and semiotic complexity. Accepting the problematics of Kristeva's approach to the religious aspect, her refusal to deny the efficacy of the religious impulse whether perceived as adolescent or not, her location of such an urge towards transcendence being expressed through the agency of language encourages a confidence in the mobilization of her theories regarding non-religious presence of the spiritual within texts. That presence may encompass a gamut of human qualities such as love, compassion, hope, longing, suffering, forgiveness as well as hate, violence, negativity, fear, oppression and non-communication. Spirituality articulates such qualities and gives credibility to them in dramatic form, widening the theatrical dimension. The discovery of vibrant areas of text wherein spirituality may be found confirms that view.

Correspondingly, that the spiritual emergence in the texts not only of the practice plays but also in the eight canonical works is open to historicisation, facilitates a definition that, while possibly restricted in application to all English drama, can be usefully applied to the drama of the post-war period being studied.

Drawing on a plethora of empirical evidence found in the writing of the two practice plays and developed in the analyses of the eight published texts, I offer the following definition: spirituality in a dramatic text is a locomotive and animating force which enables a range of expressions of the transcendent in autonomous, hybrid or (in this study) Christian-religious mode and is present in the text in either positive (Eros-oriented) or negative (Thanatos-oriented) registers through the compositional devices of the author.

Chapter Two

'That dark fountain': Vibrant Areas as Insights from Practice

The word as a minimal textual unit turns out to occupy the status of mediator.¹

Julia Kristeva

You are the thing that you are exploring.²

April de Angelis

That spirituality can be accessed and observed in dramatic texts in 'vibrant areas' employed to structure and evoke spiritual emergence is a proposal that, in part, requires a process of creative writing practice to explore fully. If authorial strategies mark a regenerative process by which the spiritual is transposed into a form where it can inhabit text and enable performativity that transposition is best observed in engaged exploration. In order to further this discovery I pursued a self-aware critical process of composition of two new plays, *The Ruth Ellis Show* and *Servants*, undertaken to explore the presence of spirituality in a dramatic text. This was then complemented by a process of production and reception by which findings could be further elucidated. By gaining an understanding of process I was able to develop a topographical methodology which then could provide the basis upon which to undertake a critical study of vibrant areas in canonical plays written between 1935 and 2000.

The discoveries of this practice-as-research component, with its repeating forms emerging in original play-texts helped to formulate the working dialogic methodology for finding spirituality in dramatic texts. It was useful to explore the creative process by which spirituality emerged in text in order to fully understand and appreciate the authorial processes at work in the canonical texts.

Discovering Spirituality

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* ed by Leon S. Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p.66.

² April de Angelis, *Royal Court Podcasts*
<<https://royalcourththeatre.com/podcast/episode-2-april-de-angelis-talks-to-simon-stephens/> [accessed 30.3.20]

Language, for Julia Kristeva, possesses a channelling quality. For Kristeva, not only does every word, every 'minimal textual unit', turnout 'to occupy the status of mediator' but the capabilities of powerful mediation in fully-formed sentences or paragraphs are very recognisable in dramatic works.³ Moreover, for Kristeva, 'Language in its heterogeneity [...] is a powerful factor that, through unknown mediations, has an activating [...] effect on neurobiological networks.'⁴ For neurobiological networks may be understood not only the creative apparatus of the playwright but the mind of a solitary reader, the variegated collective presence of an audience, not to mention the mindset of actors and director. The heterogeneity of language admits spirituality, as a dimension of the human, to be articulated and presented through its unknown mediations. If Kristeva's language theories disclose some awareness of mystery—'unknown mediations'—it is the attempt of this project to demystify to some extent the constructs which channel in-text spirituality. Kristeva's approach to language is helpful in understanding the processes of the discovery of spirituality in dramatic texts because not only is her work open to the consideration of drives like spirituality inhabiting texts but also her approach recognises the extraordinary richness and layered depths of language itself. Among these possible 'unknown mediations' may be included the vibrant areas of a play text. Yet to emphasise authorial language is not to reassert the old opposition between language and body, nor re-establish old hierarchies.

Vibrant areas exist in text according to the desires, strategies and selectivity of the playwright. Donnalee Dox sees a shift in an understanding of text as less a logos-driven phenomenon in the Western sense, to text as a site of affect, if 'language emerges from an embodied mind'.⁵ Adding this perspective makes sensing spirituality in language less prescriptive: spirituality is latent in the body and has a human aspect. Language, as representative of a speaking being, enables an expression of it. Vibrant areas then become examples of that spirituality which playwrights have evoked in particular text situations characterising aspects of the human. These text situations are those which are created to convey a spiritual meaning in dramatic terms, a recreation or recovery of something remembered or observed but transformed by the playwrighting process into a new context. To observe that the author may become a medium of human spirituality requires however a closer engagement with creative practice.

³ Julia Kristeva, p.66.

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press 1989), p.36.

⁵ Donnalee Dox, *Reckoning with Spirit in the Paradigm of Performance* (Anne Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2016), p.13.

Vibrant areas can be lifted out of context for reasons of critical study but their real life and potency remains in their position within the text. This of course has implications for the cutting of text: not only may injudicious cutting destroy the integrity of the playwright's creation but also may excise a dramatically useful vibrant area. This might compel an ethical decision on the part of the director and/or production team.

This emergence of spirituality, plotted and managed through a variety of structuring devices can be identified only through a resolutely single-authored experiential approach, albeit one necessitating a reflexive, even self-critical, attitude. As playwright April de Angelis said in a recorded conversation with Simon Stephens, 'You are the thing which you are exploring'.⁶ Exploring in this way meant cultivating an awareness of my subject position, particularly in relation to the subject positions of the principal characters, their gender, social background and spirituality, constituting the 'otherness' which needed to be understood before it could be dramatized.

Writing the Spiritual: Modes, Registers, and Agency

Looking closely at the dramatic text as it is being created reveals a playwright's general use of literary devices such as imagery to encapsulate and vivify authorial purpose and creativity in the making of a drama: the bricks and mortar of a playwright's trade, as it were. But *looking more closely*—twice, so to speak—reveals a double, more potent use of such literary devices so that figures such as imagery, patterning, prosody and so on are seen to function as conduits of the spiritual, having a directional agency and doing much more work in a play than they possibly would have done in a novel or poem, for example. Familiar terms of critical analysis become a means of highlighting ways in which dramatic texts mobilise the spiritual—in pericopes, sections, moments—that are not 'simply text' but offer a form of practical engagement in the Kristevan terms previously described and in the modes and registers hitherto outlined.

Vibrant areas of text animate and bear witness to the emergence in practice of different kinds of spirituality engineered by the author. In this research, these potent textual pericopes present spirituality in the three modes already described—the **autonomous**, the **hybrid**, and the **Christian-religious**—and present in two contrasting dramatic registers, **erotic** or **thanotic**. And it is in and through the composition of the texts that a methodological means of finding and identifying spirituality within the text has been recovered, in the moment it was being created. The sense of spiritual transmission

⁶ April de Angelis, *Ibid.*

is in this way, caught, named and apprehended as a creative process in order to be recognised serving its purpose as a critical tool.

In these two plays the autonomous mode most readily came into consciousness when evoking the spiritual and this, I suspect, was dictated by overriding dramatic concerns. Dramatic concerns likewise dictated the use of the spiritually-hybrid mode, divulging components of the autonomous and the religiously-aspirational, identified as Christian in this study. Vibrant areas evoked the Christian-religious mode less often because I was not writing particularly religious plays. However, there were enough moments in *The Ruth Ellis Show* evoking Ruth's Christian inclination (the choral villanelle which concluded the second act) and, contrastingly, Virginia's well-documented mystical awareness (her *relived memory* of the waves at St Ives). According to theologian Erik Varden: 'The religious person constructs his life on the certainty that he is *not* autonomous, and glories in it.'⁷ The characters in both practice plays were seen only intermittently to be subjected to that kind of pressure.

Nine vibrant areas were found and identified as a result of this approach. These nine areas were: imagery, prosody, patterning, strategically-placed statement, dance, relived memory, rhapsodic language, incompleteness and silence. Of these, four vibrant areas were found to be common to both practice plays: imagery, patterning, relived memory and dance. Vibrant areas found to be unique to each play were: strategically-placed statement and silence (*The Ruth Ellis Show*); rhapsodic language and incompleteness (*Servants*).

Process of Composition

Writing and performing the spiritual, I came to understand, were interconnected and inseparable in the process of dramatic composition. This is because, during the act of writing, at least for me, there was an evolutionary journey from the performance space of the mind to the performance space of the stage. The role of the facilitating imagination was intrinsic. As the play is written it is performed in the mind.

Until the plays were worked out in the performance space of the mind, that inner theatre, the scripts could not be transferred in written form onto the page. Accordingly the first act of my play *The Ruth Ellis Show* was written in segments of ten pages then performed by actors in a studio setting, segment by segment, in successive weekly meetings. See Figure 1 on page 45. Various directors—Martin Wall, Debbie Kent, Lesley

⁷ Erik Varden, *Entering the Twofold Mystery* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2022), p.20.

Ewen and myself—took turns in getting these segments up on their feet. As the segments of script were performed, I could observe (or not observe) the vibrant areas come to life as written. At no point could any rewriting by others be permitted or entertained: this would have undermined the integrity of the practice. This was the case with the final productions directed by Jack Paterson. Any directorial embellishments in staging—the use of a Pathé News item in *The Ruth Ellis Show* or underwater imagery in *Servants*—did not find their way into the texts. I did not want the integrity of the text contaminated by the work of earlier directors. On the other hand, small mistakes in rehearsal such as Stephanie Briggs’s circumvention of the line ‘It is for Art’ to simply ‘Art’ did. Such mistakes did not alter the vibrant areas in the text. As John Osborne argued, ‘It is not true to say that a play does not ‘come alive’ until it is actually in performance. Of course it comes alive—to the man who has written it, just as those three symphonies must have come alive to Mozart during those last six weeks’.⁸ But aliveness in the mind can only be witnessed by one person, the author, and further witnesses are needed for any dramatic work, an audience, awake to the incorporation of in-text spirituality. Hence performance became an important part of the practice, rehearsal and final production, resolving what might be construed as a paradox.

Servants, contrastingly, was begun much earlier, then put on hold while the Eliot, Fry and Bond chapters were written. This period of inaction was useful in formulating how to develop spirituality in the play by reflecting on the variety of vibrant areas uncovered in the works of the other authors. Apart from the first ten minutes of the play being performed as part of Goldsmiths Plays in 2014, the play was not performed until its full staging in the George Wood Theatre in 2016.

The plays were written during a marked a period of unrest in British society, such as the riots of 2012, and, to some extent, may reflect that unrest. Such periods of unrest may well create conditions for spirituality to take root in texts. A post-war liberal order was unravelling and a marginalisation of the poor and the needy ushered in a further period of austerity. The 2007-8 global financial crisis impacted on British society leading to an international recession; there was a rise of terrorist attacks and echoes of far-off wars such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq. Within this scenario ‘a globalisation of indifference and the hyperinflation of the individual’ took centre-stage.⁹ There was no over-riding decision to make the plays ‘relevant’ to their era of composition. The aim was

⁸ John Osborne, ‘They Call it Cricket’, *Declaration*, ed. by Tom Maschler (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), p. 45.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream: A Path to a Brighter Future* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2020), p. 47.

always to understand the means by which spirituality emerged in the play-texts and apply this understanding to other plays.

Spirituality was an essential component of the behaviour of the two female protagonists—Ruth Ellis and Virginia Woolf: well-documented aspects of their real lives, part and parcel of the way they lived. The most authentic evidence for Woolf's awareness of spirituality's wide spectrum is, apart from numerous passages in the novels, in her *A Writer's Diary*.¹⁰ In Ellis's case, biographer Carol Ann Lee notes the serenity of her last days in prison which was commented on by the prison authorities.¹¹ And, according to archivist Victoria Blake, 'Ruth spent her last hour kneeling before a crucifix that had been fastened to the wall of her cell at her request.'¹² A distant relative had worked as a warder during Ruth Ellis's last days at Holloway prison and recalled Ellis's extraordinary calm and serene manner in her final hours. I wanted, in pursuing this research project, not only to map the processes by which such spiritualities could be made to inhabit the text but also to create female characters, a fictionalised Ruth and a fictionalised Virginia, who were dependent on social struggle and conflict to reveal their spiritual trajectories. In this respect the two protagonists could not have been more different than me: male, first generation Irish, Catholic, with a working-class upbringing, three years teacher-training and forty years experience as a secondary schoolteacher. In acknowledging fundamental differences however, the common ground of spirituality can also become more apparent; an attempt made in all humility.

Two very different spiritualities could be seen to have emerged in a variety of ways and forms in the course of their lives: in Woolf's case, through her writing, relationships and reflective processes. For Ellis, in her life choices and subsequent social entanglements. The task was to explore and reflect on the writing strategies that emerged in the process of dramatizing spirituality—in these cases, complex and elusive spiritualities which, as demonstrated in the plays of Bond, Churchill and Kane, were likely to be submerged, if not suppressed.

In Woolf's case, spirituality was suppressed for fear of her being thought religious. Practice provided an opportunity to research how dramatic writing could capture elusive spiritualities via vibrant areas. The Bloomsbury milieu in which she moved and lived had a humanistic ethos with a certain antipathy towards religion which was perceived as a

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), pp. 101-103;105; 137.

¹¹ Carol Ann Lee, *A Fine Day for a Hanging* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2012), p.295.

¹² Victoria Blake, *Ruth Ellis* (Kew: National Archives, 2008), p.95.

remnant of abandoned Victorian values. Yet the philosophy of G.E. Moore with its emphasis on 'good' pervaded their thinking and Bloomsbury friends included the newly-converted Anglican, T.S. Eliot, the deeply religious Lady Ottoline Morell and poets such as Walter de la Mare with his interest in the supernatural. Woolf nevertheless confessed in her Diary to her 'mystical feelings',¹³ feelings which gave her more discomfort than satisfaction, although her spirituality tended towards the non-religious.¹⁴ Unlike the educationally-challenged Ellis who left school at fourteen, Woolf's spirituality was closely enmeshed and expressed in her love of and use of the English language: 'One always sees the soul through words'.¹⁵

Woolf was a writer, Ellis was not. The writerly aspect provided the opportunity to show differentiation in the female spiritualities of both characters: that which was highly articulate and that which was not and how these could be evoked in vibrant areas of text. The frustrated nature of Ellis's spirituality in her oppressive social nightclub world of 1950s London would contrast with Woolf's in being less articulate verbally and yet degrees of congruence in two spiritualities under duress could be shown because of the life situations in which they found themselves. Millie's spirituality would be equally frustrated in her relationship with Woolf: a casualty of class barriers and presumed behaviour, perhaps. Writing strategies included using a more articulate language where appropriate especially with regard to the portrayal of Woolf, taking into account her phrasing, choice of words and syntax as revealed in the novels and diaries, and a lesser fluency, particularly with regard to the uneducated servant, Millie, and, to some extent, the educationally-challenged but socially-ambitious Ruth Ellis.

Within their trajectories 'voice' became an important consideration dramatically for the consistent evocation of these disparate spiritualities, allied as it was with language and drama. Not simply the timbre, the inflection, the accent, syntax of their speech, but the character-laden expression of that in writing strategies employed to evoke those often spiritually-frustrated voices. Listening to recordings of both Ellis's voice and of Woolf's, a common vibrancy of expression and tone is notable.¹⁶ The vibrant, false,

¹³ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*: 'I must come to terms with these mystical feelings', p.137.

¹⁴ 'It is not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with.' *A Writer's Diary*, p.101.

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, p. 154.

¹⁶ Recordings of Woolf and Ellis's voices are available online. For Ruth Ellis's voice from a surprisingly articulate recorded discussion with Desmond Cussen visit *The Ruth Ellis Files*:<<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09vpgr7>> [accessed 15.2.19]. Virginia Woolf's voice recording of an excerpt from a talk called 'Craftsmanship' is available on You Tube:<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8czs8v6Pul>> [accessed 15.2.19].

plummy tones of an ambitious working girl driven to commit murder and hang for it does not seem so distant from the upper-class drawl of a woman destined to be one of the great modernist writers and yet, troubled by mental affliction, sought death by drowning. The intention was to 'show' Ruth's trajectory in a wide-spectrum light, not as the sleazy murderess of film noir, and Virginia as a more-or-less happy creative in thrall to the 'other', not as the depressive intent on suicide. Calling them by their first names was intended to bypass any assumptions of an iconic Ruth, Virginia or Millie, and to present their spiritual trajectories in a less-clichéd way, up close and personal, in which vibrant areas personal to them could be directly discovered and explored.

Mapping the Evidence

As the process evolved in practice I found generally that my own spirituality had a direct, if distant, relation to the spirituality being evoked in the text. This suggests that some intrinsic understanding of spirituality must exist in the writer even at the unconscious level before it is transformed by the creative imagination into spirituality-in-text. As explored in Chapter 1, spirituality goes through a regenerative, transformative process in its journey from the human to the technologized in the creative composition of playwriting. In consolidation with this argument, my own playwriting process, travelling by the same route, becomes a legitimate mode of enquiry.

Indeed the transformational writerly process was observed to effect a certain economy on the spirituality being evoked, giving it a certain slant as it were, to match the needs of the play. I was reminded of Emily Dickinson's

Tell all the truth but tell it slant—
Success in circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The truth's superb surprise¹⁷

Dickinson goes on to state that 'the truth must dazzle gradually' and I think this is what happens when the vibrant areas are created by the playwright: technologized spirituality contributing gradually in the text to the whole dramatic effect through incremental appearances. This means that each play carries a different stamp, as it were, or, in popular parlance, presents a distinct 'voice' to mark out its unique expression of the spiritual. There can be observed signs of an Eliot spirituality, a Bond spirituality, a Churchill spirituality, a Kane spirituality... Yet the vibrant areas themselves, whatever the register they are cast in, either positive or negative, Eros-oriented or Thanatos-oriented,

¹⁷ Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, [1970]1990), pp. 506/507.

as discovered in the self-reflexive process of writing itself, can be seen to deploy similar repeating forms of representation from one play to another. This suggests that spirituality inhabits the human creative process on a variety of levels and in repeating forms.

A key question the practice asks is: To what extent does the writing of a play involve an awareness of the process of manifesting spiritual form in dramatic literature through creating vibrant areas? Such an awareness can go on to support a new critical approach to the reading of texts. A new critical sensibility is created by the creative process attuned to detecting such vibrant areas in play texts.

According to playwright Florian Zeller, the experience of drama performed in a theatre is 'maybe the only situation for me where the public has soul, specific soul, for one night and I don't know exactly why but I am moved by that.'¹⁸ In Zeller's reckoning, an audience may share in an undifferentiated collective spiritual experience, encompassed in the word 'soul', responding to an experience in which the writer has a distinct part to play. This chapter attempts to clarify the dimensions of writerly contribution to the audience's experience of soul by focusing on my experiential awareness of the complexities of writing the spiritual. Through practice I found that language had a quality of mediumship. Not only are actors vehicles of transmission of text but, owing to a dramatic text's concentrated structure, layers of meaning can be channelled immediately by the author through dialogue and stage action and grasped by a reader or an audience.

Using Kristeva's panoply of insights into the function of language (and her generosity of vision regarding the broad scope of human behaviour) together with a study of the individual ploys of creativity adopted by my own PaR and a scrutiny of the representative work of the six canonical playwrights, answers to this key question are attempted.

As I encountered modes of spirituality emerging in my own writing, so the spirituality encountered in reading the dramatic texts of Eliot, Fry, Bond, Churchill, Shaffer and Kane presented imagery as a major textual area for facilitating spirituality's emergence and was, perhaps, the most vital of several vibrant areas. That this is so is not so surprising, given that, in research carried out with children by David Hay and Rebecca Nye, 'using imagery was a potent strategy for [expressing] their spirituality'.¹⁹

¹⁸ David Sexton, 'Florian Zeller interview: I learnt how to be happy through theatre', *Evening Standard*, 23 September, 2015
<<https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/florian-zeller-interview-i-learnt-how-to-be-happy-through-theatre-a2953956.html>> [accessed February 2nd, 2019]

¹⁹ David Hay with Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child* (London: Fount, 1998), p.131.

Clearly, from a study of *all* the dramatic texts, using imagery as a strategy for expressing spirituality lasts well into maturity. Imagery then becomes a means of apprehending and qualifying spirituality in a dramatic text, presenting as a vibrant area itself, taking on a function beyond traditional literary analysis.

Moreover, three vibrant areas not found by later analysis of canonical texts were uncovered in the process of writing the two new plays: rhapsodic language, incompleteness and dance.

***The Ruth Ellis Show: 'The slow enchantment of this lighted space.'*²⁰**

Using a flashback technique from the court's condemnation of Ruth Ellis to death by hanging for the murder of her lover David Blakely in nineteen-fifties London, the play plots Ruth's spiritual trajectory via her toxic relationship with Blakely in the oppressive social world of post-war Britain. Ruth, ambitious for self-betterment and scraping a living as a nightclub hostess, with responsibilities as a mother to two children, falls foul of the patriarchal manipulation of the period. A Chorus gives voice to Ruth's unconscious feelings and comments on the play's trajectory. The events leading up to the trial are remembered—or misremembered—by Ruth in impressionistic narrative segments. The deteriorating relationship with her son André reveals her alienation from her own human values of care and concern. The pressures of living day and night in the pernicious austerity of the narrow criminal world of post-war London creates a febrile atmosphere for spiritual intensities to emerge. As someone from a poverty-stricken working-class background myself I could identify with Ruth's concerns with regard to money and employment and the crushing anxieties which could either destroy or intensify any deep-rooted spiritual impulse.

In such an environment, imagery was found, through the writing process, to be the most potent vibrant area for channelling such a fraught spirituality. In their different ways, prosody, patterning, strategically-placed statement, dance, silence and relived memory also proved valuable conduits. The choice of iambic pentameter as a medium for much of the script facilitated an appropriate coiled-spring tension.

Vibrant Areas: Imagery

In such a tense scenario, spirituality was likely to emerge in gobbets of loaded imagery. Ruth felt deeply—the overwhelming explosion of anger in the final act of murder is evidence of that—and I wanted to show a sequential emergence of a variety of spiritual

²⁰ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 310.

feeling in vibrant areas. The main images which became conduits of spiritual content are war, gun; carnations, wound; doors, space; darkness, light, and greenness. A relational pattern developed in the employment of these images.

War emerged as a key textual image to channel Ruth's labile spirituality, now erotic, now thanotic: a locomotive energy articulating the war within and which drove her psyche to engage with and surmount the obstacles in its way. There is a sense that Ruth's darker torment as an oppressed yet determined 1950s woman divided her as a person and is being transferred and perpetuated onto her son, André:

The second world war is still going on?
RUTH:
No more hot bricks, crêpe soles, or drizzling shoes:
The memory of those sights we never lose.
ANDRÉ:
We keep the memory but the days are gone?
RUTH:
The second world war is still going on.²¹

Ruth's image of war indicates a fluctuating non-religious spirituality, expressive of an interior monologue of searching remembrance, now positive in the telling of her experiences to her inquisitive child, now negative when the image becomes symbolic of at once her own interior and continuing war and the unquiet British society she moves within: 'the second world war is still going on'. In Ruth the post-war crisis of religious spirituality is acted out in tragic, if ultimately redemptive, terms.

The image of the gun became a potent carrier of negative, compacted and thanotic spirituality. 'I am the gun' Ruth replies in an example of the potency of the isolated, strategically-placed single statement. This effect is prepared for by the preface of Jackie, Ruth's barmaid friend, being told by Ruth that 'There is a fresh lemon in the drawer' to go with her Pernod, then holding up an automatic in consternation.

JACKIE:
Fresh lemon? And – (*Holds up automatic.*) – guns.
RUTH:
Guns? (*Pause.*) I am the gun.²²

The image of the gun encapsulates the latent violence of Ruth's compressed and unhappy spirituality. Guns were easily available in the post-war sub-criminal underworld in which Ruth lived. This image would indicate placement as a thanotic marker of autonomous spirituality, a compressed interior monologue which is also an example of

²¹ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 253.

²² *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.299.

the strategically-placed isolated statement. Emily Dickinson's 'My life had stood—a loaded gun—' flickered into the creative consciousness at this point.²³ The image evokes multiple evocations of Ruth's growing underworld pressures, her increasing readiness to explode in response to provocation and the sense of a psyche frozen out through suffering which, in Yeats's memorable phrase, 'can make a stone of the heart'.²⁴ Stone because, as a loaded gun, provoked by a seismic shift in suffering, Ruth's repressed tortured spirituality explodes with lethal consequences for her and Blakely.

Similar imagery of spiritual stasis were to be found in Bond's *Saved* where the inanimate rocks used to stone the baby to death are also images of the calcification of feeling among the working-class youths.²⁵ Yet Dickinson's loaded gun is not a malign one: it does not presage the act of murder. Once the gun is fired, Ruth is momentarily spent and 'confused', gaining more spiritual potency through the 'disappearance' of her story which happens at the end of Act One and as argued by Peggy Phelan.²⁶ Phelan argues that the ephemerality of theatre is also its strength: the first act murder climax allows time for an audience to reset its perspective on Ruth during the interval even though the second act begins moments later. In the course of the drama Ruth slips and slides through different modes and registers of spirituality evoking her free-floating anxiety so that this image itself has a spiritual ambivalence.



Figure 1. Carnations as imagery: script-in-hand rehearsal.

²³ Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (London: Faber and Faber, 1975 [1975], p. 369.

²⁴ W.B. Yeats, *Selected Poetry*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan and Company, 1964), 'Easter 1916', p. 95.

²⁵ Edward Bond, *Saved*, (London: Methuen Drama, 1966), pp. 62-72.

²⁶ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 146.

Coco Maertens as Ruth.

Physicalised images such as the ready-made image of red carnations thread like a signifying motif for spiritual and physical suffering through the play-text. Their use, however, is rooted in factual relevance. A mundane image became an image with a spiritually-potent vibrant area in the text. The uncanny recurrence of red carnations at climactic points in Ruth's recorded life, the vulnerability and relatively long life of these cut flowers is used to evoke Ruth's ongoing inner passion and thwarted hope as well as symbolizing the trail of blood Ruth leaves in her wake.²⁷ Their recurrence at climactic moments is mentioned three times in Ruth's ghost-written 'memoir' *My Love and Hate* in the *Woman's Sunday Mirror* of 1955.²⁸ Ruth's story appeared over three weeks before and after her execution, in three 'exclusive' instalments. Apart from one or two inconsistencies (i.e. Clare McCallum (Mac), Ruth's first love, is reported as having been killed in action when in fact he went back home to his wife and family in Canada) and some facts obviously gleaned from attending the trial, the detailed account is remarkably accurate suggesting that the public at large, or at least those connected with the newspaper, may have known more than the jurors. There are facsimiles of her handwritten letters, intimate postcards from Blakeley, photographs, and even her formal birthday party invitation from the Carroll Cub. It is not clear how the newspaper gained access to this intimate material, the truth of which has been corroborated by subsequent book-length studies.

In the play they appear anonymously, even in the condemned cell:

RUTH:

It's a long time since I felt such kindness.

It is Holloway; it's not Hollywood...

Awkward laughter from both. Pause.

Somebody is sending red carnations.

JACKIE (*incredulous*):

Who would do that?

RUTH:

No message.

JACKIE

Sans message.

RUTH:

And the warder keeps telling me 'It's time...'²⁹

'Goodbyes are said with red carnations' Ruth says laconically after taking them from a repentant George Ellis and being reminded of the carnations which her former lover,

²⁷ Carol Ann Lee, *A Fine Day for a Hanging*, p.48.

²⁸ 'My Love and Hate', *Woman's Sunday Mirror*, no. 18, June 26, p. 7; no. 20, July 10, 1955, p. 6.

²⁹ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.296.

Clare Andrea McCallum, had given her.³⁰ Using the taxonomy of terms outlined in Chapter One, this image presents in the playtext as a negative thanotic marker of autonomous spirituality, evoking, according to Kristeva, a feature of the adolescent's 'high risk ideality' which, though holding promise, ends in repeated and frustrating stasis.³¹ The carnation image, though indicative of the sentimentalized, stultified spirituality of George Ellis and Clare McCallum, became, through dramatic repetition, an emblematic trope of Ruth's own spiritual trajectory in the play through association, stasis and symbiosis: a *memento mori*, a recurrent symbol of love and death. The discovery of the image raises a fresh critical awareness, sensible to the layered image of the daffodils in Kane's *Cleansed* and the flowers in *Blasted*, both spiritual images as argued in Chapter Six, *Opening the Curtains*, although there was no conscious attempt to make such connotations during the act of writing.

The image of 'the wound which bleeds', with its echo of the recurring red carnation image, functions on multiple levels, both autonomous and Christian, in the hybrid mode, with erotic/thanotic nuances, evoking a suffering spirituality as well as Ruth's menstrual cycle:

I have a wound which bleeds and no one knows
The pain inside which spirals like a song:
A song that I must sing, a song I chose.³²

In this pantoum, an intricate verse form, similar to the villanelle,³³ where the second and fourth lines of a quatrain become the first and third lines of the next, shared between Ruth and her other self, Ruth 2, there is an indirect allusion to Christ's bodily suffering which seems apt considering Ruth was a non-practising Catholic who nevertheless asked to see a priest before her execution. The verse form was chosen for its ability to evoke psychic suffering and trauma, Ruth's journey is one along a trajectory of autonomous non-religious spirituality with a veering towards Christian-religious transformation towards the very end.³⁴ This makes the image an indication of a hybrid spirituality, rooted in the body, such as that found in Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*: 'Cut out my tongue / Tear out my hair / Cut off my limbs / But leave me my love'.³⁵ Ruth, like Kane's

³⁰ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p.249.

³¹ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p.19.

³² *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 267.

³³ Babette Deutsch, *Poetry Handbook* (London: Jonathan Cape, [1958] 1965), p.100.

³⁴ This aptitude for religious transformation was indicated at the age of six, when having taken part in a nativity play as a baptised Catholic, Ruth remembers, dressed as 'an angel with a silver halo entwined around my golden hair', feeling 'ready to be taken up to heaven at any minute.' 'My Love and Hate', June 26, p. 6.

³⁵ Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis* (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), p.28.

protagonist, is searching for meaning in her misery. This hybrid aspect of Ruth's spiritual journey in the play was recognized by an audience member with the following observation: 'there was a real sense of the ensemble as a congregation, the speaking-as-one reminiscent of the Passion reading on Good Friday.'³⁶ For Ruth, an awareness of 'the wound which bleeds' corresponds to a move towards Kristeva's sense of 'the religious need [...] proposing 'to legitimize the ideality syndrome'.³⁷

Doors imaged thresholds of imminent and archetypal spirituality. Real doors were inevitably prominent in Ruth's actual life as harbingers of doom or promise: the door to the gallows behind the wardrobe in the condemned cell, the trapdoor of the gallows itself, the doors to the nightclub and home. In the play, immediately after the Prosecuting Counsel asks 'Do we know where Mrs Ellis acquired the gun? Do we know?', André, her ten-year old son, asks: What is behind that door?

RUTH:

Behind that door?

ANDRÉ:

Behind the wardrobe. The dark behind that.

The door opens slightly. A whoosh of sound.

A stream of light shines through. RUTH 2 appears, standing beside the light.

RUTH:

None of us knows what is behind the door.³⁸

Referring to the taxonomy of terms, the door image in the text classified as a positive hybrid marker of Ruth's autonomous non-religious spirituality, but moving towards the mystical. The appearance of Ruth 2 in 'a stream of light', as given in the stage direction, added to the impact of Ruth's verbal statement. This sequence, possibly seeming portentous on the page, in performance was effective. An audience member noted that 'the diffusion and confusion of spaces, times and roles fit to portray the woman who has the problem of setting her own boundary.'³⁹ In Peter Brook's terminology, such an image touches 'something of the hidden feeling behind certain events, of bringing the invisible to palpable life.'⁴⁰ Sound and image were expertly timed by the director, Jack Paterson, to maximum theatrical effect. The structure of the play unfolded metaphorically as a

³⁶ Rapid-Response Questionnaire, *The Ruth Ellis Show*, answer (c) to question 3. Appendix 3. p.362.

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p. 20/21.

³⁸ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 262.

³⁹ Rapid-Response Questionnaire, answer (c) to question 1. Appendix 3, p.361

⁴⁰ Peter Brook, interviewed by Paul Taylor in 'Master of Mysticism: Why spirituality plays a crucial role in Peter Brook's work.' *The Independent*, Interview (4 February, 2010) <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/master-of-mysticism-why-spirituality-plays-a-crucial-role-in-peter-brooks-work-1888687.html>> [accessed 25.2.15]

series of opening and shutting doors as scenes in Ruth's life are encountered and experienced in rapid succession.

Journeying into space became an image evoking the confused ontology of André's spirituality as he becomes increasingly aware of his mother's predicament:

CHORUS (*echo-chamber as music fades*):

Journey-into-Space -

ANDRÉ:

All systems check. All systems check. Roger.
Over and out. Over and out.

RUTH *taps out a single key on the piano.*

Stand by for blast off. Stand by for blast off.
Mayday. Mayday. Mayday, Mayday. Mayday.⁴¹

André's spirituality at this point is autonomous, established as a positive animated distinctiveness but fixed in an embryonic stage of spiritual autonomy with its tendency toward blind trust and hopefulness, pre-religious in Kristeva's schema.⁴² *Journey into Space* was a successful radio serial by Charles Cilton, first broadcast in 1953-54 on the BBC Light Programme, and I have used the idea of journeying into space as an image to parallel and evoke André's spiritual alienation, distancing and being adrift from his mother.



Figure 2. André's increasing isolation from his mother symbolised

⁴¹ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.305.

⁴² Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p. 11.

by a telephone call.

Darkness imaged and articulated a deeply troubled spirituality, indicating a thanotic hybrid register, its base in war-like criminal subversion rather than in the occult. The Chorus, as an extension of Ruth's psyche, expresses the Jungian shadow of Ruth's social world:

The dark is nicer than the light anytime:
A place of subversion and good for crime,
Listen to our story: it's true, no pap:
If you want to stay in business: don't take the rap.⁴³

The rap-like rhythms of this choral intervention convey the crass but serious internal dilemma: live by the standards of the criminal underworld or forge a solitary path towards personal success in spite of being enmeshed by it. Thematically the negative hybrid spirituality of such darkness segues, as part of the play's patterning strategies, into André asking 'What was that Mum? Why is that man screaming?'⁴⁴ as he hears a client of Conley being tortured, then to Ruth answering the Defence Counsel's question about her 'peculiar idea' by saying 'I had the peculiar idea / I wanted to kill him'.⁴⁵

Contrasting with the ever-gathering darkness of tone, as if Ruth in the play is trapped within a strange extension of wartime, the image of greenness evokes more innocent healing memories for Ruth, an example of the meditative language of erotic non-religious spirituality:

CHORUS:

Access a memory of green shadows,
A cooling stream, sunlight on the water –
Shadows shimmering in a dark sweetness,
A dragonfly's wild spin, aquamarine
⁴⁶

Ruth often made forays into the Kentish countryside, often with various lovers, including David Blakley, to villages like Brasted, and I used this escape from the metropolis as evocative of a longing for an autonomous erotic spirituality, an aspiration, perhaps, to a simpler, less complex ontological condition. After this accession to a more transcendent state of being, it seemed appropriate to let Ruth affirm, 'Where he goes, I will go', echoing the statement made by the Biblical Ruth in the Old Testament story.⁴⁷

⁴³ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.304.

⁴⁴ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.304.

⁴⁵ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.305.

⁴⁶ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 286.

⁴⁷ 'The Book of Ruth', *The Bible, The Old Testament*, RSV, Chapter 1, verse 16.

With reference to Kristeva's theory of abjection, in Ruth's case provoked by shock, trauma or exploitation, the Chorus voices the concerns of her broader consciousness. The employment of Kristeva's abjection theory in Ellis's case is appropriate to help gauge the spiritual turmoil of the rediscovered Catholicism of her last days and is in no way meant to be judgemental. Kristeva notes a movement towards transcendence in the lowest depths of abjection: 'abjection accompanies all religious structurings and reappears, to be worked out in a new guise, at the time of their collapse'.⁴⁸ Ruth's murky spirituality slips from one register to the other before consolidation into a traditional faith stance at the end of her life. Sarah Kane employs the gentle, positive imagery of 'spring rain', albeit in the stage directions, in *Blasted* to achieve a similar effect.⁴⁹ The Chorus voices Ruth's veering towards the religious in their quiet, understated, closing villanelle 'We must walk carefully towards that light':

No step too fast, no hurrying or pain,
No backward look or time to say goodbye.
To shed a tear: at least that will be plain.
It is serene and clear: this moment I.⁵⁰

The villanelle form was chosen for its meditative qualities, the intricate structure of repeating lines rendering a sense of moving steadily towards the unknown.

Light is an ambivalent image for Ruth suggesting the limelight she craved and the promise of something forever out of reach: 'I live in shadow but I seek the light'.⁵¹ In her sonnet, light evokes a safe interior space: 'Is it then a crime / To stay in this pure world, in this bright field / In love with love and longing for the light? / And does this longing serve to make it right?'⁵² But she recognizes later, valuing her spiritual stasis: 'The slow enchantment of this lighted space.'⁵³ For Ruth, images of light and darkness have an uncertain meaning as her mainly suppressed spirituality is forever swinging between two worlds. I place the closing sequence of Act Two, with its movement towards the mystical, as evocative of a newly-achieved autonomous /Christian hybrid spirituality, in a positive Eros-oriented register, as suggested by Waaijman and indicated by Kristeva as an escape from the abject. Light for Ruth does not have the same ecstatic connotations as the 'Thy Light' of Eliot's *Women of Canterbury* in *their* closing sequence but her

⁴⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay in Abjection*, trans. by Leon. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia, University Press, 1982), p.17.

⁴⁹ Sarah Kane, *Blasted, Act One*, p. 24.

⁵⁰ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 312.

⁵¹ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 259.

⁵² *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 306.

⁵³ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 310.

gathering awareness of the numinous through inner suffering is comparable.⁵⁴

The patterning of war/gun, red carnations/wound, door/space, darkness/light and greenness set up in the text were not consciously determined but a product of the integrating creative imagination characterising the precarity of Ruth's inner world in her time of trial. It is the complex patterning in the text which distinguishes a vibrant area from a familiar spiritual symbol. The intrinsic patterning dynamic of the playwriting process holds all in tension in the dramatic scheme of things, enabling the vibrant areas to spring into spiritual and dramatic life.

The images were held within the medium of blank verse which is dependent on the exhaled human breath for its effects when spoken on stage.⁵⁵ Various linguistic forms—sonnet, pantoum, villanelle, quatrain, heroic couplet, triolet—were used to intensify and convey moods of personal anguish, particularly through imagery. 'Show' in the title has the layered sense of revelation, both personal, biographical and spiritual as in the 'showings' of Julian of Norwich, but also, ironically, presenting the 'hyperinflation of the individual'.⁵⁶

David Blakely's triolet evokes his profound spiritual confusion with a kind of rueful humour⁹

DAVID:

What can I say? And who would believe me:
Stuck in the shadow of a famous name.
No court can hear, no judge retrieve me.
What can I say? And who would believe me?
There's no real appeal that can relieve
me!
For me, for her— it's not nearly the same.

Pause. Then, quietly.

What can I say? And who would believe me?
Stuck in the shadow of a famous name.⁵⁷

The image of being 'stuck in the shadow of a famous name' conveys his discomfiture at being overshadowed by Ruth's notoriety in court but also an embittered sense of his being the one actually condemned by posterity. The complex repetitive schema of the triolet verse form dramatises his profound anxiety and pain.

⁵⁴ T.S.Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral, Act Two*, p.84.

⁵⁵ 'The sound of form in poetry, descended from song, moulded by breath, is the sound of that creature yearning to leave a mark.' Glyn Maxwell, *On Poetry* (London: Oberon Masters, 2012), p 121.

⁵⁶ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. by Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p.67; Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*, p.47.

⁵⁷ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 294.

Prosody

Although she could be pointedly concise, explosive, dramatic, in her use of language when the need arose, Ruth Ellis was unused to linguistic elaboration in public or in written form. The need arose at a climactic moment in the trial when, questioned by Christmas Humphreys, the Prosecuting Counsel, as to what she had in mind when she fired the revolver, she replied: 'It was obvious that when I shot him I intended to kill him'.⁵⁸ Much of the dramatic language created for the character of Ruth needed to be compressed in order to evoke the explosive nature of her suffering. In terms of prosody, blank verse, with its contained rhythms and patterns, conveyed the necessary coiled-spring tensions. The verse was juxtapositioned against intrusions of remembered prose court sequences to create dramatic tension and to foreground text freighted with spiritual import.

Verse accounts for the majority of the playtext with prosaic interventions from the trial accounting for the rest. In *Murder in the Cathedral* the plain prosaic rhythms of Becket's Christmas sermon and the banal justifications of the Knights point up and foreground the impact of the spirituality of the verse outpourings of the Chorus. I wanted the prose interruptions from the trial to disrupt and complicate the unfolding narrative of Ruth's remembering and for both prose and iambic pentameter to be held in a dramatic tension.

Verse and metre were frequently fragmented so that the line-break in Glyn Maxwell's theorising does not alone mark the punctuation.⁵⁹ The fragment ends mark it too as in:

RUTH:

I—I remember... standing there:
Standing, as if I were someone other...
So much red, so much... so much red. I—I
Never— I have never seen so much red.

SOMEONE
(calling):

She got him!

RUTH:

Call the police.

CHORUS:
(*sotto voce*)

⁵⁸ *The Trial of Ruth Ellis*, ed. by Jonathan Goodman and Patrick Pringle (Bath: Chivers Press, 1974), p.110; 'The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One, p.279.

⁵⁹ Glyn Maxwell, p. 58. 'Line- and stanza-break are the same: white punctuation.'

I am the police.⁶⁰

Careful positioning of words evoked the numinosity of the remembered spiritual:

CHORUS:

Access a memory of green shadows,
A cooling stream, sunlight on the water —
Shadows shimmering in a dark sweetness,
A dragonfly's wild spin, aquamarine,
Hover in that green shade, and do not leave
Until the last drop of night dries away —⁶¹

The repetition of the word shadow suggests the private nature of Ruth's recalled autonomous spirituality in an Eros-oriented register, expressed by the Chorus, and the word aquamarine, positioned between commas, evokes not only the dragonfly's vivid colour in flight but also the tender fleeting aspects of that spiritual realm.

Two simple rhyming quatrains placed strategically after the last appearance of red carnations in the cell, delivered mysteriously as in real life, and before Pierrepont walks forward, empowers the chaplain's last blessing, made all the more effective because the Chaplain says very little beforehand:

CHAPLAIN (*earnest, quiet*):

Behold the One in whom all things are made:
The beating heart, the pulsing breath.
In the dark of Love be not afraid:
There is new life, an end to death.

Mark now the Peace where in all grief may rest.
In the dark of Love be not afraid.
May your soul find healing and be blessed.
Behold the One in whom all things are made.⁶²

Actor Rob Wallis delivered these lines with an unhurried simplicity and depth of feeling. Love which has always eluded her will be there for her at end. The liturgical line of 'In the dark of love be not afraid' echoes Ruth's torch song of Act One 'The Dark is Good for Love'. In the quatrain is encapsulated Ruth's move from a complex autonomous spirituality into the Christian religious.

⁶⁰ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p.280.

⁶¹ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.286.

⁶² *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.314.

Patterning and Strategically-Placed Statement

The fragmented patterning of the play itself dramatizes the fraught, confused inner and outer worlds of the protagonist. This is especially relevant with regard to the positioning, within fragmented court prose sequences, of heartfelt outpourings in different poetic styles: triolet for David Blakely—‘What can I say and who would believe me?’⁶³ (echoed later by Ruth in ‘But I do want people to believe you’,⁶⁴ summing up *his* confusion; villanelle or pantoum for the Chorus. Ruth’s sonnet, ‘This moment is a give and take of time’, Act Two,⁶⁵ positioned before Bickford visits to persuade her to appeal against her sentence, received a tremendous depth of listening silence from the audience.

The strategically-placed isolated statement is dependent on patterning and juxtaposition for impact. As already suggested, a line like ‘The slow enchantment of this lighted space’⁶⁶ depends for its effect on the placement in the text. I see this as an evocation of an essential autonomous spirituality, conveying joy and effusiveness as ‘the re-ignition of primary processes created by play’ according to Anita Hammer, that is in this context the play of creative composition.⁶⁷ Ruth’s spirituality is labile in the play, as it almost certainly was in real life, moving back and forth from the positive to the negative, the erotic to the thanotic, from the autonomous to the Christian-religious, emblematic of the move away from ‘churched’ spirituality as noted by sociologist Grace Davie.⁶⁸ This patterning dynamic is central to understanding the achieved moments of spiritual release within the text.

Other isolated lines make their impact, owing to strategic placement between linguistic lulls and pauses, carrying a weight of agonized autonomous spirituality: ‘The cry at the heart of the universe’, Act One,⁶⁹ which conveys Ruth’s existential cry as well as the daughter she is describing; ‘This is the time of the robin, piping /Its singular tune’, Act One,⁷⁰ images Ruth’s own spiritual survival as well as that of her son. Ruth’s final line of Act One conveys a vexed, troubled spirituality: ‘I’m guilty. And – (*Slight pause.*) And rather confused.’⁷¹ These are examples of autonomous spirituality. However all three do show slippage from one stage of spirituality to another: ‘The cry at the heart of

⁶³ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.294.

⁶⁴ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 294.

⁶⁵ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.306.

⁶⁶ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.310.

⁶⁷ Anita Hammer, *Between Play and Prayer* (Amsterdam-New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2010), p.85.

⁶⁸ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), p.76.

⁶⁹ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p.261.

⁷⁰ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 274.

⁷¹ *The Ruth Ellis Show, At One*, p.280.

the universe' and 'This is the time of the robin' corresponding to Kristeva's theory of a longed-for ideality in the midst of suffering⁷² These isolated lines can be understood as achieved moments of spiritual release within careful patterning but dependent on a critical process of selection and placement for maximum dramatic effect. The patterning utilizes various non-verbal forms: dance, silence and suppression.

Likewise Ruth's explosive statement 'I am the gun' depends on its dramatic and spiritual potency on placement within the text at the end of a short sequence where Ruth is recoiling from being sacked by Maury Conley, her boss, and so is part of the strategic patterning. Not only, in *Act Two*, is it a culmination of all the thanotic gun imagery which has been used throughout the play like background music in a cinematic forties noir thriller, in various tones and registers, but presents as a moment of truth and disarming self-awareness. It was the same honesty which led to her conviction. This would place her at this point in the drama in a negative thanotic register of spirituality, expressed with self-awareness and ironically witty.

Not that the mediations of the spiritual are always, in drama, evocations of the positive. As suggested above, mediations can encompass and quite capably show the machinations of the spiritually negative. A sense of that negativity may be why Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is traditionally referred to as 'the Scottish Play' during rehearsals. A sense of the spiritually thanotic may be no less present in other dramatic works.

Ruth 1 is the pro-active Ruth, the Ruth who makes the bad decisions suppressing her authentic spiritual life in favour of a longed-for social valorization. Ruth 2 is the self who witnesses this, watches and articulates those longings, silent but not inactive: expressing herself in movement.

Dance

Dance is the first patterning strategy employed and is a vibrant area in itself. Ruth's other self, Ruth 2, shadows Ruth 1 mainly in dance. So dance and movement become an autonomous spiritual language for Ruth herself, emblematic of her secret unspoken longings. According to Kristeva, dance is 'this language which surpasses the human',⁷³ situated as it is 'at these crossroads of body and meaning, of biology and sublimation'.⁷⁴ For Kristeva, the trans-linguistic experience of dance 'exceeds the impending threat of

⁷² Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p. 12.

⁷³ Julia Kristeva, 'Going Beyond the Human Through Dance', *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, vol XXI, no 1 (2013), p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.3.

apocalypse.⁷⁵

Often repressed, Ruth 2 is reconciled with Ruth 1 in the closing scenes of the play. The divided Ruth characterizes Ruth's sense of being 'detached' after shooting David Blakely.⁷⁶ The dramaturgy of two Ruths maps the spiritual schizophrenia but provides a surge of transcendence. As will be noted in Chapter Three, *T.S. Eliot: Re-visioning the Spiritual*, Isadora Duncan always claimed she danced the Chorus, allowing 'multitudes' to speak through her one person and body, but, here, Ruth 2 is dancing Ruth herself: articulating her longing, hesitation, regret and finally, reconciliation and forgiveness. Ruth herself, as noted above, had found a degree of serenity in her last days in prison which was commented on by the prison authorities. As the ten-minute segments of *At One* were rehearsed weekly, script-in-hand, I had a sense of another Ruth—Ruth 2—who was watching everything that unfolded in the drama. Perceptively, this development was also anticipated by a member of the cast, Christina Majea Acevedo, playing Jackie Dyer. I had been prompted by Ruth's own statement, referred to by Carol Ann Lee, that she had been 'someone else' when she pulled the trigger. It was only until we discovered dancer Michaela Lagoudaki that this possibility came to fruition in the final stages of rehearsals for the actual production.

In both plays dance assumes an important part of the semiotic communication system, albeit in different ways. In *The Ruth Ellis Show*, dance is the means by which Ruth's other self, Ruth 2, conveys Ruth 1's aspirations, longings and wracked decision-making. She embodies, in a non-speaking role, a facet of Ruth's autonomous non-religious spirituality until, at the end both Ruth 1 and 2 embrace and a degree of reconciliation and acceptance is reached towards their fate. This moment was appreciated in two audience members' responses to the framed question 'Can you identify any 'spiritual' moments that you felt were there in the performance tonight?—'Ruth embracing herself. / When the two Ruths joined together.'⁷⁷ That the device worked so well is due to the expressive dancing and acting of Michaela Lagoudaki and the choreography of Goldsmiths students Tom Granthier and Josie Underwood. Ruth herself recalls taking dancing lessons to help her gain confidence in society and 'longed for the day I would glide across the ballroom in a beautiful picture gown.'⁷⁸ Dance is associated with transcendence and transformation in Ruth's real life and so it is in the play. Dance in the play evokes autonomous spirituality in a positive, erotic register, with

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.3.

⁷⁶ Carol Ann Lee, *A Fine Day For a Hanging*, p.191.

⁷⁷ Rapid Response Questionnaire for *The Ruth Ellis Show*, answer b) to Question 3. Appendix 3, p.362

⁷⁸ Ruth Ellis, 'My Love and Hate', p. 6.

its relationship to the body, according to Matthew Fox, but leaning towards expressing the ineffable, that which cannot be put easily into words.⁷⁹

Dance in both plays is a vibrant area unseen in the chosen Bond, Fry, Eliot, Shaffer, Churchill and Kane plays although towards the end of *The Lady's Not For Burning*, with the promise of freedom offered to Jennet and Thomas, the chaplain does observe that he 'would like to see them dancing'.⁸⁰ At the end of Eliot's *The Family Reunion* instead of dance there is physical movement when Agatha and Mary 'walk slowly in single file round and round the table, clockwise', 'completing the charm' as they move.⁸¹ Their circular movement, after each revolution of which 'they blow out a few candles so that their last words are spoken in the dark', expresses the dark autonomous non-religious spirituality at the heart of the play. Spirituality in dance emerges in various manifestations in purely physical ways, emerging through the body rather than through words, yet still remaining an essential a component of text as given in the stage directions, showing an earthy provenance. The semiotics of dance is a multi-layered signage system and in the two plays that multi-layered system admits spirituality.

Silence

Like dance, silence in *The Ruth Ellis Show* text serves to evoke Ruth's incommunicable spiritual complexity and dilemma. These silences are indicated in the stage directions and are examples of how stage directions themselves can channel spirituality as they do in Kane. Ruth responds with an articulating silence when the Clerk of the Court asks 'Prisoner at the Bar, you stand convicted of murder. Have you anything to say before judgement of death is passed according to law?'⁸² Ruth's silence is precisely documented in the court transcript and is an example of my transportation of an aspect of her actual behaviour to serve the spiritual needs of the text.⁸³ Such silence is indicative of positive autonomous spirituality, 'touching the invisible currents which rule our lives' according to Peter Brook, where the interiority cannot be voiced.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1983), p.63.

⁸⁰ Christopher Fry, *The Lady's Not For Burning, Act Two*, p. 63.

⁸¹ T. S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943), p.136.

⁸² *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 240.

⁸³ From a photocopy of the *Court Transcript*, National Archives, Kew, upon which Goodman and Pringle's book is based.

⁸⁴ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: McGibbon & Kee, 1968), p.50.

Later, Ruth's in-court composure breaks. Her 'silent tears' on being shown a photograph of David Blakeley evokes her spiritual agony of grief, regret and guilt. The spiritual agony cannot be communicated except through silent tears.⁸⁵

There is a similar shocked silence after Ruth has been punched in the stomach by Blakely:

She is breathless, contorted in agony. She stumbles towards the chair. She sits down. A moment.

Let me find love, O God, let me find love...

Pause.

Not like this. No, no; no, no. Not like this.⁸⁶

The above lines, expressed after the shock of severe pain and assault, evokes what has been constellating within Ruth's psyche and body and her spirituality at this point is one of longing for safety, assurance and redemption. The speech is punctuated by little pauses, suggesting a profound inner turmoil as well as acute physical pain. Spirituality evoked here in the text is best described as Christian-religious spirituality in an Eros-oriented register, signified by 'our relation to the Absolute', according to Waaijman.⁸⁷

Ruth's stuttering silences evoke her critical autonomous spirituality before being provoked by Cussen to go in search of Blakely:

Ant... Ant... Is... Is... Is Da... vid...?

Is David...? (*Looking round wildly, angrily.*) Clare? Dad? George? **Maury?**

DESMOND:

Won't answer. You—you—you know what to do?

RUTH:

I... What...? Who? ⁸⁸

The silence after the shooting, again a stage direction, at the climax of the second act, precedes the Chorus's whispered villanelle-inspired 'We must walk carefully towards that light.'⁸⁹ Ruth's silence here evokes the ineffable dimension of her suffering. A further

⁸⁵ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 272.

⁸⁶ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 277.

⁸⁷ Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), p.1

⁸⁸ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.311/12.

⁸⁹ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 312/13.

silence evokes Ruth's focus on the un-nameable before the chaplain offers her the sacrament of viaticum.⁹⁰

Relived Memory

In his *The Original Vision*, Edward Robinson found that many of his subjects' experience of spirituality was conveyed mainly through vocalised remembered experience from childhood which had remained suppressed for many years.⁹¹ I was mindful of this when fathoming out how Ruth could have retained her spiritual sense throughout her life as a nightclub hostess in that sleazy post-war underworld setting and later, during the weeks she spent in prison. It seemed there must have been internal sacred spaces she hung on to throughout her ordeals, and which sustained her in her final weeks.

Her first memory, which leads to the unfolding of the drama as given above, begins, as already stated, in Act One:

You must wait a little—Mr Pierrepont—
There's so much—that people— don't know about—⁹²

Here Ruth lays claim to her own narrative, and in doing so gives permission for her own suppressed spirituality to emerge. It emerges transformed in erotic images of cars, engines, paint and petrol as she recalls her infatuation with David Blakely:

The throb of cars,
The pulse of that new engine, as I wait,
The feel of that sleek paint, a touch of doom,
Faint smooch of petrol—bright distant thunder—⁹³

Then it appears, obscured, in a jaundiced but passionate tirade, in line with rhapsodic utterance, critiquing the false spiritual values she saw around her:

Everything was spiffing. We were spiffing.
They were spiffing. Hitler's bombs were spiffing.
The Blitz was spiffing, Spitfires in the sky
Were spiffing. Spiff, spiff! Veronica Lake
Was spiffing, blonde hair hung over one eye.
Post-war rationing was spiffing, and yes
The Festival of Britain was spiffing,
The new Elizabethan age—it's all
Spiffing—⁹⁴

⁹⁰ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 313.

⁹¹ Edward Robinson, *The Original Vision* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983, p. 53.

⁹² *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 244.

⁹³ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act One*, p. 258.

⁹⁴ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p.264/65.

The process of writing and generating vibrant areas of this nature draws attention to a similar use of lists employed by Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral* evoking the Chorus's 'pained awareness, an acute enumeration of agonized perception and frustration'.⁹⁵ Though expressed with a controlled fury, Ruth's tirade can be seen as evidence of a positive autonomous searching spirituality, described by Ursula King as 'a process of transformation and growth'.⁹⁶ Kristeva might add a caveat emphasising the adolescent nature of this transcendent anger.

As noted above, Ruth has a recurring memory, vocalized by the Chorus, of a green shadowed space:

Access a memory of green shadows,
A cooling stream, sunlight on the water—⁹⁷

The sustaining memory of a sacred space, though suppressed, is recalled with passionate feeling and animated distinctiveness by the Chorus, as an aspect of her split-off self, and is an example of the positive autonomous spirituality expressed in rhapsodic language described by James Hillman as animation of spirit and 'often travelling by the way of *via negativa*'.⁹⁸ In the play, Ruth's moments of abjection are not entirely predicated on nothingness as might be suggested by Kristevan theory but also on a soul-saving memory of sacred space. The benign eruption of what was suppressed manifests itself in slips and slides between spiritual registers, provoked by intense suffering.

These various strategic elements evoke a complex and vibrant web of spirituality within the text which contributes to a nuanced creation of the character of Ruth and her other self, Ruth 2, as she remembers and relives events leading up to her moment of execution. In the play Ruth presents as a deeply-flawed human being compelled to make the wrong choices as she attempts to survive within an abusive social setting.

***Servants*: 'Hearing that dark fountain within, its language and story.'**⁹⁹

In writing *Servants* (2017), completed at the same time as I was writing the Sarah Kane chapter but begun much earlier, I wanted to show dramatically Virginia Woolf's natural mysticism powered by a searching spirituality which was not religious. I think it

⁹⁵ Chapter Three, *T.S. Eliot: Revisioning the Spiritual*, p. 95.

⁹⁶ Ursula King, 'Spirituality in a Secular Society: Recovering a Lost Dimension', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 7, 3 (Summer 1985), 135-39 (p. 135).

⁹⁷ *The Ruth Ellis Show, Act Two*, p. 286.

⁹⁸ James Hillman, *The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire*, ed. by Thomas More (London: Routledge, 1990), p.122.

⁹⁹ *Servants*, p.359.

was appreciating the visceral nature of Sarah Kane's writing which helped unblock a stasis encountered after having written a third of the *Servants* script. Kane's *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis* proved as repressed spiritually as Woolf's was in real life. To plot the spiritual trajectories of Virginia and Millie in *Servants* I learned from the way violence freed spiritual blockages in Kane's scripts (as will be seen) and enabled me to continue writing the play. Physical violence was an ongoing feature of the real Virginia Woolf's mental instability—she had 'been violent with the nurses' during manic depressive attacks—and sudden violence became a dramatic feature of her real-life personal journey.¹⁰⁰

Woolf's deep spiritual leanings—'these mystical feelings' she refers to in her diary¹⁰¹—would be complicated in the play by her avowed atheism and her personal conflict with her servant, Millie, an invented character reflecting traits of previous actual servants, Nellie and Lottie. All three contradictory traits were well-documented aspects of her life.¹⁰² In turn, Millie's latent spirituality would be portrayed in conflict with Virginia: two characters with contrary longings for transcendence, living lives of close interdependence under one roof. The play shows spirituality emerging during the intense relationship with Virginia and her servant, Millie, as they live together over a period of ten years.

I mapped in the text Virginia Woolf's neediness compromised by a spiritual volatility expressed in her relentless desire to create written representation of the self over a long inter-war time scale. This tension is mirrored and underscored in the relationship with her servant. In Kristevan terms this unassuageable desire, contrasting with Millie's more workaday unspoken concerns regarding personal survival and valorisation, shows the indelibility of Virginia's spiritual quest. This character's infantile desire, on the one hand, showed, through the deployment of the creative imagination, aspects of a Nietzschean will-to-power and, on the other hand, of a Kristevan 'subject in process'.¹⁰³ Both protagonists revealed a need to create sacred spaces in which they cultivated a shared capacity for representation.¹⁰⁴ I understood the need for such sacred spaces in my own life trajectory and from studying Virginia's writing and what I could find of Ruth's autobiographical reflections, saw the recurrent need for such retrievals of self,

¹⁰⁰ Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p.77.

¹⁰¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), p.137.

¹⁰² Notably by Alexandra Harris in *Virginia Woolf* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011), pp. 96-98.

¹⁰³ Julia Kristeva, 'The Subject in Process', ed. Ffrench and Lack, *The Tel Quel Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 133-178.

¹⁰⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Sens et non sens de la revolt* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), p.188.

and this as facets of their dramatic development. Such a need would override any aspects of class and gender: the clue was in portraying a shared humanity: mine, Ruth's, Virginia's and Millie's.

Again, in practice, imagery made known its potency as a transmitter of the spiritual.

Vibrant Areas: Imagery

The image of the door had a similar resonance for Woolf in real life as it had for Ellis. It was a portal to the beyond, holding mystery and reserve, but also a class-conscious barrier between the outer world and the inner. Leonard and Virginia Woolf never answered their front door unless the servant did. In the play, after Millie's threat to quit, naming their refusal to answer the door as a main gripe—'If I don't open the front door the guests go away thinking you are both not at home'—Virginia voices chronic spiritual anxiety in her 'The door opens. The tiger leaps.'¹⁰⁵

Critic N.C. Thakur saw Woolf's imagery as charged with symbolic meaning, calling her 'a mystical poet'.¹⁰⁶ A. D. Moody, taking a more secular approach, argues that her mystical tendencies as a writer were checked by 'anchoring the narrative in external realities'.¹⁰⁷ For the purposes of creating a believable drama I sought to reconcile such views, weighting them slightly in favour of that of Alexandra Harris who acknowledges Woolf's 'great & astonishing sense of something there, which is 'it'.¹⁰⁸ Woolf's professed atheism was constantly undermined by her own interior insights and epiphanies—'matches struck unexpectedly in the dark'—and drama was one way of engaging with this.¹⁰⁹

In the play, the door—or the search for one—functions as the attempted interface between a repressed spirituality and a forward-reaching one, thereby placing it as a marker of autonomous spirituality, or what Comte-Sponville calls atheistic mysticism. The real Woolf may well have been largely a mystical atheist in Comte-Sponville's terms but in the play she is frequently on the cusp of a manic spiritually-hybrid expression, as it appears she was in real life. The historical Woolf uses the image of a window to suggest

¹⁰⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: Penguin Books, 1951 [The Hogarth Press, 1931]), p. 90. The statement is given as one sentence separated by a semi-colon.

¹⁰⁶ N.C. Thakur, *The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.10.

¹⁰⁷ A.D. Moody, *Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p. 32.

¹⁰⁸ Alexandra Harris, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 96. Quoting Woolf's *Diary*, 27 February, 1926.

¹⁰⁹ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1938 [London: The Hogarth Press, 1927]), p. 186.

these possibilities: the window through which she, as a child, heard the sound of the sea at St Ives and the window evoking visions of transcendence in *To the Lighthouse*.¹¹⁰ In Eliot's *The Family Reunion* there is a similar use of the image of a door looking through to the rose-garden as a portal onto the ungraspable; 'something that we cannot name' in Brook's words.¹¹¹

The protagonist Woolf's sense of being spiritually behind a barrier is evoked in: 'She was on one side and life was on the other, and she was always trying to get the better of it, as it was of her. A depth of silence seemed to say 'Hold still, hold fast to that which matters— hold still amid the endless discourse.'¹¹²

With its search for meaning the door image places itself in a spiritually hybrid mode, marked by joy and effusiveness. But something from beyond the barrier is trying to erupt or break through, symbolized by the repeatedly-striking hallucinogenic gong. The gong is an image of unrealized spirituality, an unlived and unknown portion of herself which has been repressed. This is further imaged in the box which has to be unwrapped:

MILLIE:

People been giving you gifts.

VIRGINIA:

No, no. It's something I caught sight of, need to unwrap.

MILLIE:

I've got something I'd like *you* to unwrap.¹¹³

Both Virginia and Millie in the play are on journeys of discovery, the complex autonomous spirituality coloured by more physical undertones. Millie is referring to her 'pages' but in both exchanges there are flickers of more personal needs. These needs are at once displaced and resolved in the autonomous erotic spirituality of the dance. The play is a movement toward the discovery of self for both Virginia and Millie and their spirituality is mainly unspoken except for a few climactic, physicalised moments.

¹¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', pp. 64-65; *To the Lighthouse*, p. 144. 'And smiling she looked out of the window and said (thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness) —'. The title of the first part of the book is called 'The Window'.

¹¹¹ Paul Taylor: 'Why Spirituality plays a Crucial Role in Peter Brook's work', p.2.

¹¹² *Servants*, p.321.

¹¹³ *Servants*, p.328.

The discovery is imaged in Virginia's 'No bolt, no bar will curb the freedom of my mind.'¹¹⁴ The door will be opened despite the tiger who may leap and pounce. The door opens in a subsequent monologue, giving way for a rhapsodic expression of her own personal vision of life, itself as noted above, adapted from her essay 'Modern Fiction'. Situated where it is in the text, between two moments of vulnerable emotional dependency on Millie, this again amounts to an affirmation of autonomous non-religious spirituality in an Eros-oriented register: a joyous, affirmative, effusive outpouring. In terms of spiritual development Kristeva might place Virginia at the adolescent stage of longing for the absolute with her 'suspended states and subtle sensations'.¹¹⁵ Virginia's singularity urges her to challenge the symbolic by presenting the spiritual within the semiotic. Kristeva would acknowledge Woolf as an 'originary genius', a 'tributary of a philosophy of immanence' with a visceral sense of the power of text even if 'she does not dissect it as Joyce does'.¹¹⁶ Virginia seeing the soul through words.

The image of 'the Emperor of Abyssinia', is at once an image of her inscrutability and, in Kristevan terms, of her 'strangeness to herself', an awareness of which recurs unbidden throughout the play. Such recurring awareness, half understood by the scripted Virginia, serve to problematize the depiction of her spirituality, complicated by a sense of 'the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid 'us'.¹¹⁷ The image is also an allusion to the historical Woolf's part in the Dreadnought hoax of 1910 when members of the Bloomsbury group disguised themselves as African royalty and fooled the admiralty into giving them a tour of this state-of-the-art battleship, is a strategically-placed statement designed to evoke the precarity of her spiritual position. Appositely, this was the year in which the real Virginia Woolf believed 'Somewhere around 1910 the world changed. And it started with the servant'.¹¹⁸ As an example of autonomous spirituality expressed as interior remembrance, it hovers between the erotic and the thanotic, as it dramatises her prone-ness to personality disorder.

¹¹⁴ *Servants*, p.340.

¹¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p. 20; 'Oscillation Between Power and Denial', trans. Marilyn A. August in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York, Schocken, 1965-67), p. 166.

¹¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Incredible Need to Believe*, p. 36/37; 'Oscillation Between Power and Denial', p.166.

¹¹⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p.192.

¹¹⁸ *Servants*, p. 319.

The key image of the meal, shared in the text by Virginia and Millie,¹¹⁹ specifically, but referred to throughout the play, evokes ongoing attempts at harmony and reconciliation in their relationship, suggesting the natural bond of positive autonomous spirituality. In their discussions of the progress of the meal, 'Preparation is vital', as Virginia points out, inadvertently commenting on their relationship. Food is a central motif in Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse*, as the Ramsay family sits down to *boeuf en daube*; it is central to Kane's *Blasted*, with eucharistic overtones throughout and at the end. Critic Alexandra Harris makes a similar point about 'the ceremonial last supper' aspect of the meal in *To the Lighthouse* and, for Julia Briggs, 'the dinner becomes something of a sacred rite, as the guests form a community.'¹²⁰ *Servants*, food and cooking functions as continually binding images of spiritual dependence, mutuality, creativity and survival.

For Millie, the image of 'pages' evokes her deeper aspirations and longing for transcendence away from her menial job through secret creativity. The audience is kept guessing as to what exactly these pages are. Though possibly not sharing Virginia's assumption that Millie may be trying to write a novel, 'pages' may have various connotations for the audience such as poetry, letters, short stories or indeed chunks of her life which she has sacrificed for Virginia.¹²¹ But to Millie 'My pages is where I am'.¹²² The autonomous spirituality of this single statement embodies Philip Sheldrake's criterion of 'an alternative way of exploring the deepest self and the ultimate purpose of life'.¹²³

¹¹⁹ *Servants*, pp. 341/343.

¹²⁰ Alexandra Harris, p.98; Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (London: Penguin Books 2006), p.173.

¹²¹ That servants might be able to write is borne out by the success of Margaret Powell's *Below Stairs* (London: Peter Davies, 1968).

¹²² *Servants*, p.347.

¹²³ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality, A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), p.5.



Figure 3. Virginia unwraps the chemist's jar.

The image of the chemist's jar, a stage prop noted in the stage directions, which has to be unwrapped from a box, again evokes a buried aspect of Virginia's character and is based on a true incident in Woolf's life. The director, Jack Paterson, suggested lighting the box from within so that light would emit as it was opened. This worked well, theatrically, suggesting an ethereal and other-worldly aspect. Had we managed to find an actual jar, this magical effect might never have been staged. The light which shines from the jar, and the contents itself, image Virginia's suppressed spirituality which becomes effusive once she unwraps the parcel. What was in the dark is now brought into the light: in the same way as her creative writing emerged into the world, Virginia's suppressed spirituality, like Millie's, is also in 'her pages'.

The emblematic image of the dark fountain in the closing sequence of the play, uttered by Virginia as an epiphany, arose in the intensity of composition alongside an incorporation of her own real-life statement 'We are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.'¹²⁴ The process of writing threw up this last image to voice Virginia's creativity. 'Dark fountain' evokes Virginia's self-confessed romantic vision of the ineffable although the phrase itself is by the play's author, not by Woolf.¹²⁵ The image is a useful

¹²⁴ Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', p.85.

¹²⁵ Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, eds. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1977-84), vol 2, p. 103.

way of thinking about the subterranean way spirituality functions in a dramatic text, occasionally rising to the surface in one of the vibrant areas. Subterranean because part and parcel of the compositional apparatus of the author, a hidden drive bubbling away within the domain of language until emerging lucidly in that fountain-like way at authorially-managed strategic points to give spirituality a literary form.

Relived Memory

Millie's spirituality intermittently casts off this suppression in her excited and staccato conversation with Virginia about the excitement of writing and publishing, something she clearly longs to do: 'Exciting, ain't it. Writing.'¹²⁶ Though Virginia tries, unconsciously, to divert Millie's gathering excitement, the excitement bubbles over and what had been suppressed is relived as a troubling encounter with the ineffable during a visit to the Hampstead Heath fair. The fair was shutting down for the night and she was left isolated from her friends and in partial darkness:

MILLIE:

The silence; not a sound. Fairground lights: gold, silver, red. The Big Wheel came to a stop. Dodgems, Noah's Ark, Swing Boats, Chair-O-Planes: all stopped. (*Slight pause.*) I came to a stop too. I came to such a place of stillness and silence I never thought I'd get going again.¹²⁷

Millie's discombobulation—'I never felt so frightened or so at peace'—provokes Virginia's intensely-felt childhood recollection moments later, revealing a common ground of expressive memory:

Flowers on a curtain shot through with afternoon light. And the blind twisting and turning, twisting and turning. The toggle on the cord knocking the wall. Me, in shadow, listening and watching. (*Slight pause.*) Far off, the salt smell of the sea and the waves breaking.¹²⁸

Both sequences correspond to an autonomous spirituality in an erotic register, rooted in the body. Both are unsettling experiences, derailing psychic balance, hitherto suppressed, and reaching when conscious towards a more painful and personal individuation. In Virginia's case the experience relived in the play has its origin, as stated, in a genuine childhood experience in her holiday home at St Ives.¹²⁹ In Shaffer's

¹²⁶ *Servants*, p.347.

¹²⁷ *Servants*, p.350.

¹²⁸ *Servants*, p. 351.

¹²⁹ Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past' in *Moments of Being* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1976), pp. 64-65.

Equus, relived cathartic memory is coaxed from Alan Strang under hypnosis.¹³⁰ For Kristeva, such reliving of memory is an assimilation of the uncanny so that 'we neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside' but integrated and transformed, it becomes a means towards transcendence.¹³¹

For Millie, the relived memory was transcribed for the play from an experience I had at the age of eighteen in a deserted theatre. In this sense the play draws on my own spiritual development and, particularly, as a writer for theatre. To show spirituality emerging in drama is as important creatively for me as it is for the characters I create. Edward Robinson recounts many 'vital experiences' like the above in his survey of what he calls natural and religious experience in a variety of subjects. According to Robinson, for the individual, personal 'growth may seem gradual and uncomplicated, and 'normal' enough, but there may be many significant moments of truth, as well as much turmoil and resentment'.¹³² These 'significant moments of truth' are often suppressed childhood experiences until recalled during adulthood, parlayed here into significant dramatic moments.

In the process of writing I did consider that ascribing an experience recalled by a male author (myself) and transferred via the transforming imagination to a female dramatic character was problematic. However the attempt was to locate a shared experience of fluid spirituality in adolescence when spirituality can be less gender specific. David Hay and Rebecca Nye testify to the plasticity of children's spirituality.¹³³ The experience of composition included a sense of the otherness of the characters and the distance between them, without diminishing the possibility of shared experience. Relived memory can be generic: we often share similar memories without particular gender differences and that consideration justified the insertion of my memory as a facet of Millie's experience.

As noted, unlike Robinson, I find both a developmental model to be useful in mapping a character's ontological evolution in a play and the fluidity model useful for showing a character's existential behaviour within a particular passage of time.

Rhapsodic Language

¹³⁰ Peter Shaffer, *Equus* ed. by Adrian Burke (Harlow: Longman, [1973] 1993) Scenes 19, 20, 21; pp. 48-59.

¹³¹ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p.192.

¹³² Edward Robinson, pp.106; 113.

¹³³ David Hay with Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, pp.132-133.

Counterpointing the physical realm of dance, a corresponding language trope of rhapsodic language had to be created to evoke Virginia's imaginative verbal flights, studying her phrasing, her use of prepositions, textual rhythms, and idiosyncratic vocabulary. The real Virginia frequently indulged in intense verbal outpourings whether in Bloomsbury company or not. As Leonard Woolf put it: 'She might suddenly 'leave the ground' and give some fantastic entrancing, amusing, dreamlike, almost lyrical description of an event, a place or a person. [...] these displays [...] were always short.'¹³⁴ I suggest that these sudden displays were effusions of autonomous spirituality in real life, expressing her deeper humanity, and it seemed useful to use this as a vehicle to evoke a spirituality of words. It is easy to believe the truth of Leonard Woolf's observations because such imaginative exuberance is there in the novels and essays. The Great Frost passage in *Orlando* is a typical example of such virtuosic imaginative writing, albeit an extended one.: 'At Norwich a young country woman was seen by onlookers to turn visibly to powder and be blown in a puff of dust over the roofs as the icy blast struck her at the street corner.'¹³⁵

Moments of privileged rhapsody are offset with Millie's more down-to-earth concern with daily domestic management. As Virginia says in the play, reacting to the delicious smells from Millie's cooking: 'Without good food how would English literature survive?'¹³⁶ The interdependency of spiritual and material realms is a leitmotif throughout the play. In Walter Benjamin's terminology, no refined or spiritual things could exist without the fight for the crude and the material.¹³⁷ Virginia is shown to depend on Millie for her physical survival and freedom to write but the twist is that Millie too has a secret inner spiritual life expressed in her 'pages'.

In the play the 'displays' are given with the audience as witness and usually Millie is offstage. They form a contrast to Millie's more prosaic spiritual concerns regarding the cooking. With Millie off stage, and after a few agonized reflections on why she must write fiction, Virginia expresses what *really* concerns her, 'leaving the ground' with 'Imagine. Imagine an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel.'¹³⁸ The celebrated

¹³⁴ Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), pp. 30-31.

¹³⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1942 [The Hogarth Press, 1928]), p. 23.

¹³⁶ *Servants*, p. 333.

¹³⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), p.246.

¹³⁸ Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' in *The Common Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1938 [The Hogarth Press, 1925]), pp. 148-149.

passage from the essay 'Modern Fiction' professes new forms but also reveals a precarious spirituality, especially in the play's context, of visionary ethereality—'life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end'. In context, the passage has all effervescence of a Christopher Fry aria.

A second example is uttered in the presence of Leonard, the only time his character appears on stage and his forbearance and love counterpointed with Virginia's rhapsodizing about the perfect weather she and Vita will have when they visit the sea:

The weather is perfect. Clouds of blue and purple flying over the downs. And the faint sound of the sea: wave reiterating upon wave. (*Slight pause.*) We might go down to Rye. Or Studland Bay. (*Slight pause.*) You'll be fine with Millie.¹³⁹

Subsequent repetitions of phrases like 'Clouds of blue and purple flying over the downs', interspersed with pauses and silences like rests in a music composition, create a rhythmic mantra-like effect and evoke a spirituality of hope and reined-in ecstasy with Rye and Studland carrying a visionary weight far beyond their actual geographical meanings.

These are examples that seek to elaborate positive autonomous spirituality couched in rhapsodic language, mixed with elements of a positive reaching towards something more, which in the words of John Coates, indicate 'the human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than ourselves'.¹⁴⁰ Yet this quest remains earthbound. Despite Virginia's hopeful spiritual ecstasy, Millie's only focus is on serving the painstakingly-prepared meal: 'The meal is ready now, Mrs Woolf. Shall we take our places?' Two levels of spirituality are revealed in complex interdependence: the visionary uplift of Virginia and the workaday transcendence of Millie.

Effusion and suppression are thus related elements. In the text, there are passages where the spiritualities of Virginia and Millie are suppressed as they must have been in real life: Virginia because of the incredulous yet heavily patronising ethos of Bloomsbury and Millie within the oppressive environment of her chores and duties.¹⁴¹

Dance

¹³⁹ *Servants*, p.345.

¹⁴⁰ John Coates, 'Introduction', in *Spirituality and Social Work*, ed, by Diana Coholic, John R. Graham and Janet Groen (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2007), pp 1-15 (p.135).

¹⁴¹ Bloomsbury friends used the blanket term 'genius' when referring to Virginia. Anything they did not understand about her they labelled 'madness'.

In *Servants*, dance forms a dialogue of communication between Virginia and Millie: at once playful yet threatening, humorous yet controlling. The Turkey Trot dance metaphors the entire relationship between Virginia and Millie yet threatens to disrupt it by its inherent reaching towards something other:

VIRGINIA:

All respectable girls need to learn the rudiments of dance.

MILLIE (*responding in kind; polite*):

When I goes to the palais, I dances. Not a lot these days mind you, what with the work I 'as to do.

VIRGINIA (*emphatic*):

Flap your arms.

MILLIE:

What?

VIRGINIA:

Flap your arms and gobble.

MILLIE:

Flap me arms and—gobble? Should I fetch Mr Woolf?

VIRGINIA:

No, he's particularly good at it.

MILLIE (*double-take*):

Blimey.¹⁴²

Though comedic, the hollow sound in the word gobble evokes the hollowness in Virginia's psyche, as she is semaphoring a manic enthusiasm for the meaningless. The dance is a displacement activity for her as much as she claimed it was for Eliot. There is also a subversive role for dance as it was metaphorically for the Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*. In Eliot's play the dance rhythms of the Chorus undermined the formal patriarchal and ecclesiastical hold over the women; in *Servants* Virginia and Millie's actual dance attempts momentarily to dissolve social and spiritual differences. In *The Ruth Ellis Show* the dance semaphores Ruth's very real longing for transcendence over the mundane.

Here, the audience is treated to a fly-on-the-wall vision of the Woolf household in an unlikely activity. Throughout the play both characters keep intruding on each other's

¹⁴² *Servants*, pp.330.

space in an attempt to reach beyond their own narrowly circumscribed experience and the dance, grounded in the body yet embodying an autonomous effervescence of the spirit, symbolizes that spirituality of yearning for something beyond their present situation, maybe a displacement of their deeper anxieties, indications of a (confused) autonomous erotic spirituality, yet emblematic of Matthew Fox's criterion of 'rootedness'.¹⁴³ For Wassily Kandinsky, dance conveyed the physical expressiveness of spirituality in 'musical movement [and] physical movement'.¹⁴⁴ In line with its use in *Servants*, for Julia Kristeva 'women are visionaries, dancers as they speak'¹⁴⁵ and dance 'speaks one of the new languages of human comedy' in its reach towards an ideality which can never be permanently achieved.¹⁴⁶

Patterning and Incompleteness

Servants is a play is built around Millie's cooking one of Virginia's favourite meals, *boeuf en daube*. To suggest the long-drawn out and fraught relationship, the meal is contextualised within a ten-year period of their lives. A basic image, the preparation of the meal, informs the patterning of the play.

I was interested in how individuals develop spiritually in such a controlled yet esoteric environment—that of mistress and servant—especially over a period of years which was often the norm in such an arrangement, even in Bloomsbury circles. The subtleties of feminist behaviour within that closed space and how it impacted on or provoked spiritual growth in both protagonists was a significant interest. The compacted timescale and the play's running time of 90 minutes allowed for variations in pace and an impressionistic approach to the writing which afforded several interstices for spirituality to emerge in the structure.

There are three notable instances of this in the text: 'To make the moment perfect'¹⁴⁷; 'If I write about silence, am I writing about death?'¹⁴⁸; 'The pulse and breath of creation'¹⁴⁹; and then the sequence beginning 'We are the music; we are the words; we are the thing itself...'¹⁵⁰ These depend for dramatic effect in strategic positioning in the

¹⁴³ Matthew Fox, *Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p.1.

¹⁴⁴ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1914), p. 38.

¹⁴⁵ Julia Kristeva, 'Oscillation Between Power and Denial', p.166.

¹⁴⁶ Julia Kristeva, 'Going Beyond the Human Through Dance', p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ *Servants*, p.344.

¹⁴⁸ *Servants*, p.344.

¹⁴⁹ *Servants*, p.359.

¹⁵⁰ *Servants*, p.359.

text so that the spirituality can be suddenly released in the silent gaps between dialogue. This is conveyed by the stage direction 'Pause'.

In all the vibrant areas the emergence of clearly-presented spiritualities are congruent with what would be seen to emerge in the play-texts of Eliot, Fry, Bond, Shaffer, Churchill and Kane but there were also new areas: incompleteness, rhapsodic language and dance.

In terms of incompleteness, a key aspect of patterning in *Servants* is the structural development of the play in short impressionistic scenes alternating with broken-off passages of narrative which suggest an unfolding incompleteness in Woolf's ongoing life experience. Gaps and interruptions in narrative development leave unanswered questions; things attempted to be said are never said; thoughts are half-uttered, misunderstandings occur randomly. Virginia and Millie talk at cross purposes as if living at different speeds and in different times.

VIRGINIA:

Has the war begun? The meadows flooded again, the river swollen. (*Slight pause.*) *Pointz Hall... Or... Between the Acts?* (*Leans forward and crosses out Pointz Hall, substitutes Between the Acts.*) Am I still that small child listening and watching for the scene to unfold?

Pause. Then: rapt, spiritual.

The pulse and breath of creation.

Pause.

A new *what* by Virginia Woolf?

Pause.

Enter MILLIE with white napkin.

Did you want me to show you now Ma'am?

VIRGINIA:

Always a servant from the kitchen or that person from Porlock...

MILLIE:

Person from Porlock?¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ *Servants*, p. 351.



Figure 4. Virginia's rapture is broken by Millie's napkin intrusion.

The interface between Virginia's inner world of contemplation and rhapsody—'The pulse and breath of creation'—and Millie's intrusive workaday world of menial but creative tasks —releases, humorously, in both, sparks of individuative, searching spirituality—'A new *what* by Virginia Woolf ?'—'Do you want me to show you now, Ma'am?'¹⁵²—which may be incomplete but suggests the joy of new beginnings.

A non-spoken, reflective autonomous positive spirituality, not always verbally—expressed, emerges within such gaps of verbal or kinaesthetic incompleteness, which moves the play along in constant small epiphanies to what Woolf called those 'matches struck unexpectedly in the dark'¹⁵³—making the moment perfect—which can be further observed in the patterning and rhythm of performance:

VIRGINIA: (*transcendent*)

To make the moment perfect...

Pause. The gong has stopped.

What book shall I write next? (*Slight pause.*) A book of silence?

Silence.

How does one write about silence?¹⁵⁴

In their enclosed, fraught worlds, their urge towards transcendence operates as a survival mechanism, overriding the more human immediacies of care and love. In

¹⁵² *Servants*, p.351.

¹⁵³ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), p.183.

¹⁵⁴ *Servants*, p. 344.

Kristevan terms in both characters there is an ideality syndrome, a relentless reaching for the valorisation of self.

Virginia and Millie in the play traverse an arc of autonomous spirituality in an Eros-oriented register, swinging close to but never quite acknowledging the religious.

Conclusion

The described methodology of practice-as-research, supported by Kristevan insights into the transmissive power of language, enabled the finding of vibrant areas in dramatic texts which admitted various categories of spirituality. The discovery of such emerging varied categories of the spiritual in English drama since 1935 was the bedrock of a critical approach which was to be applied to finding spirituality in the selected canonical texts. Vibrant areas were found to be features of the landscape of a play-text which admit the spiritual through particular language constructs and positionings. These constructs and positionings show an awareness of the transmissive properties of language and of the impact the language area chosen may make in its relationship with the rest of the play. Without their chosen positions in the structure of the play the vibrant areas would not be so vibrant. The areas themselves reflect a wide spectrum of the spiritual according to the creative needs of the playwright and mirror the spiritual trends of the later twentieth century in Britain.

In a framed question asked after each show as part of a rapid-response questionnaire— Can you identify any ‘spiritual’ moments that you felt were there in the performance tonight?— audiences were extraordinarily perceptive in responding to and recognizing the vibrant areas in the texts of both plays.¹⁵⁵ The use of such a question— with its seemingly leading use of the term spiritual—is defended by arguing that ‘spiritual’ (in inverted commas) would be understood in so many ways by those present that any suspicion that the question is ‘leading’ is neutralised. The reception of the play, as revealed in answers to the questionnaire, confirmed the findings of the literary practice rather than driving the research. The questionnaire was not designed to elucidate exhaustive scientific data but to extract a viable response within a time-frame of ten minutes from an audience on the night as to what it had seen and experienced. As Donnalee Dox points out, ‘there is no exact language for a sense of spirit’ hence the need for framing the questionnaire in such a way as to elicit a response which ‘creates a space for reckoning with the ways experiential spirituality reconfigures notions of

¹⁵⁵ Appendix 3, Rapid-Response Questionnaire, *Servants*, Question 3, p. 362 and p.364/5.

performance and performativity'.¹⁵⁶ Within these limits, the variety of responses to the questionnaire have their use. The methodology enabled a deeper understanding of how spirituality could be spotted in the text and, in recognizing the presence of vibrant areas in the text, the audience responses showed an uncanny awareness of how successful that methodology had been.

The process of finding spirituality in a text depends on an acceptance of the depths and layers of dramatic language, on a way of looking at a dramatic text as a matrix of inner drives, manifestations and trajectories. Viewing spirituality as foremostly, in dramatic terms, a reconstituted human urge towards transcendence in its locomotive transformational guises, and above all, scrutinising how it operates within the human delineation of character and story, supports the application of method to other texts. Being constantly aware of my own subject position in relation to the characters I was creating meant that a complex harnessing of the creative imagination was always in play. It was not a case of injecting my own spirituality into these characters, rather observing the transformational processes at work in composition. Though I became aware that the Jungian concept of anima (the female within the male) was among those forces in play, at some points I had the clear impression, uncannily, that my fictional representations of Ruth, Virginia and Millie were looking back at me, forming their own opinions and judgements. This might well reflect a sense of otherness, the Kristevan notion that in woman there is 'something that cannot be represented'.¹⁵⁷

Finding that, in writing the two plays, there was a repetition of vibrant areas in different modes and quantities in *all* the scripts suggests that spirituality in dramatic texts may be more prevalent in late 20th century and early 21st century English drama than is currently acknowledged.

The nine vibrant areas discovered through practice are summarily defined as follows: **imagery**, customarily understood as an aspect of literary analysis, becomes a means for finding spirituality in the poetic figures of a dramatic text; **patterning** reveals itself as a dramatic device for plotting emergences of the spiritual over a particular textual sequence, often with the effect of ratcheting up tension; **prosody** marks a passage in verse which may convey spiritual import; **silence** is a dramatic device to transmit the sense of spiritual stasis; **relived memory** may present spirituality as embodied in the present and therefore with an immediacy in performance; **strategically-placed statement** is a device to introduce a particularly vivid spiritual moment in the

¹⁵⁶ Donnalee Dox, p. xxi.

¹⁵⁷ Julia Kristeva, 'Woman Can Never Be Defined', *New French Feminisms*, p.137.

text; **incompleteness** is a device whereby the author uses a lack of clarity in dialogic expression to evoke spiritual trauma; **rhapsodic language** marks the use of language to embody spiritual outpourings; **dance** indicates a stage direction evoking a moment of spirituality which can be physicalised but not spoken.

In addition to these, further vibrant areas were to be discovered in the canonical works. The thesis is not meant to give an exhaustive account of spirituality as it appears in any text but to explore how applying PaR methodology to other dramatic works further categories of the spiritual are revealed.

The devices and strategies which T.S. Eliot uses to enable the emergence of vibrant areas in the texts of his plays *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* are explored and quantified in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

T.S. Eliot: Re-visioning the Spiritual

Poetic language reminds us of its eternal function: to introduce through the symbolic that which works on, moves through and threatens it.¹

Julia Kristeva

Theatre is an external ally of the spiritual way, and it exists to offer glimpses, inevitably of short duration, of an invisible world that interpenetrates the daily world and is normally ignored by our senses.²

Peter Brook

Elusive Spirituality in Eliot Criticism

In *Towards a Poor Theatre* Grotowski suggests that 'an act of soul' is part and parcel of being human: 'an actor may only accomplish an act of soul by means of his own organism.'³ If this is true for the actor, then it must be true for the playwright, who is no less of an organism able to function creatively as a conduit of spirituality. It follows that, performatively, the animation and expression of soul—what might be called spirituality—can be found in a dramatic text. Such a view, supported by Julia Kristeva's theory of semiotics, what is unspoken, would also suggest that spirituality is not exclusively to be found in obvious religious forms.

The copious published critical writing on T.S. Eliot has only recently begun to consider the spirituality of his plays, beyond the idea that the 'religious' is a crucial aspect of the plot and subject matter of the plays dating from 1935, when *Murder in the Cathedral* was first produced, and beyond pejorative assessments such as Katherine Worth's comment that 'The plays seem to keep their place in the not very jolly corner labelled verse and religious drama.'⁴

The late thirties in Britain was a time of social apprehension and uncertainty with the imminent threat of a second world war, accompanied by an influx of European refugees, from a belligerent Nazi Germany. To an extent both *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *The Family Reunion* (1939) can be seen to mirror that social uncertainty and fearfulness.

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 81.

² Peter Brook, *The Open Door* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005 [1993]), p.105.

³ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. by Eugenio Barba (London: Methuen, 1968). p. 211.

⁴ Katharine Worth, 'Eliot and the Living Theatre' in *Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium*, ed. by Graham Martin (London: Mc Millan and Company, 1970), pp. 148-146.

According to sociologist Grace Davie, this threshold period was also a time which saw the slow erosion of orthodox religious beliefs, culminating a post-war phenomenon of the 'unchurched'.⁵

Critics have gradually progressed from perceiving the spiritual in Eliot as a religious Christian imaginative construct—what the plays seem to be about—but it remains true that very few entertain the idea that the spirituality in the play has a very real human basis beyond Christianity, embodied in the language of the play itself. This is not surprising, since the word 'spirituality' is rarely used in post-war to late twentieth century criticism more generally. Drawing on Kristeva's theorising of the abject, more-nuanced aspects of the spiritual can be perceived in his work. What Eliot is showing dramatically is a broadening of the concept of the spiritual in both these plays, a distancing from his new-found Anglican beliefs, towards an acknowledgment of spirituality at the heart of abjection. If Kees Waaijman is correct in recognizing 'a chaotic centrifugality' in post-war spirituality studies, Eliot has anticipated this broader academic interest by fifty years.⁶

The vast critical terrain relating to *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* presents in four strands.⁷ These strands present some evidence that, over the years, critical acumen has edged forwards in engaging with the spiritual aspects of these dramas, separating it out from an awareness of religious components. In close relation to this evolving critical awareness I situate my research.

Literary concerns dominated the criticism of the two plays in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960. Notable critics such as Helen Gardner (1949), Patricia M. Adair (1951), Denis Donoghue (1956) David E. Jones (1960), George Steiner (1961), Helen P. Avery (1965), Carol H. Smith (1965), T.S. Pearce (1967), and Raymond Williams (1968) touched faintly on spiritual aspects within their literary dissections of text.⁸ Groundwork for a more

⁵ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 1994], pp.107-108.

⁶ Kees Waaijman, 'Spirituality—A Multifaceted Phenomenon' *Studies in Spirituality*, 17, (2007), p. 103.

⁷ A fifth strand, occasional random articles on the internet such as 'T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*' by Steve Newman which do not come under the remit of orthodox academic publishing but which may throw up startling insights, needs at least to be acknowledged.

⁸ Maud Bodkin, *The Quest for Salvation in an Ancient and Modern Play* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941); Helen Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot* (London: Cresset Press, 1949); Patricia M Adair, 'Mr Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*', *Cambridge Journal*, 4 (November 1950), (83-95); Denis Donoghue, *The Third Voice: Modern British and American Verse Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); David E Jones, *The Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 62; George Steiner,

substantive study was first indicated by Maud Bodkin's awareness of complex spiritual resonances deep within the texts, perceived as 'a divine voice calling from the unknown, a movement distinctive of no church' which foreshadowed later sociological observations about religiosity in Britain.⁹

Second, despite an intense but superficial engagement of the plays by Asian critics inhabiting the 1960s and continuing until the present day, exemplified by J. Guthahakurta (1968), Ranjit Kumar Singh (1988) and Kumar Viendra Roy (1993), depths of spirituality in the plays failed to be uncovered. S. K. Tikoo (1989) identified *Murder in the Cathedral* overall as 'a drama of investigation'¹⁰ and Parwati Singh (1988) observed that the play and *The Family Reunion* depicted 'various levels of consciousness'.¹¹ There are taxonomic surveys of imagery, symbol or myth with only incidental analysis of meaning, import or provenance.¹² Conversely, in their recent study of *The Waste Land*, T. C. A. Ramanujam and M. Siddharth uncovered prominent Hindu influences.¹³

Third, a closer reading regarding the spiritual, recognizing pagan and primitivist content in the plays emerged from the seventies onwards in the work of Robert Crawford (1987), Giles Evans (1991) and David Ward (1973)].¹⁴ The spiritual was approached obliquely from a psychological point of view by psychiatrist Fred M. Sander (1972) and, apologetically, by A. David Moody (1979).¹⁵ Katherine Worth, (1970) also took an apologetic approach, as quoted, but other critics such as Joseph Chiari (1973), Carole M. Becket and D. E Jones were more positive about the spiritual function of the

The Death of Tragedy (Yale: Yale University Press, 1961); Helen P. Avery, 'The Family Reunion Reconsidered', *Education Theatre Journal*, vol 17, no 1, (March 1965), 10-18; Carol H. Smith, *T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 113-115; T. S. Pearce, *T.S. Eliot* (New York: Arco, 1967), p.146; Raymond Williams, 'The Drawing Room of Naturalism' (1968) in *T. S. Eliot: Plays*, ed. by Arnold P. Hinchliffe (London: Macmillan, 1985), 133-137.

⁹ Bodkin, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰ S. K. Tikoo, *The Mystery in the Plays of T. S. Eliot* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1989), p.70.

¹¹ Pawarti Singh, *Character and Symbol in the Plays of T. S. Eliot* (Delhi: Commonwealth Publications, 1988), p.31.

¹² Kirsti Kivimaa, *Aspects of Style in T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral* (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1969), pp.70-73.

¹³ T.C.A. Ramanujam and M. Siddhartha, 'How Hindu Thought influenced T.S Eliot', *The Hindu*, October 4, 2018.

¹⁴ Giles Evans, *Wishwood Revisited: a new interpretation of T.S. Eliot's 'The Family Reunion'* (Lewes: The Book Guild 1991), p. 163; David Ward, *T S Eliot Between Two Worlds* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p.98.

¹⁵ Fred M. Sander, 'T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*: "Schizophrenia Reconsidered"', *Family Process*, vol 10, no 2, (June 1971), 213-228; A. David Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.125.

characters, particularly the chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*.¹⁶ More orthodox critiques were offered by James E. Robinson (1986) who recognized that ‘the stage is a place where the invisible can appear and has a deep hold on our thoughts’¹⁷ and Randy Malamud (1994, 2001) who, recognizing how Eliot’s language ‘undergoes a metamorphosis’,¹⁸ finds in *The Family Reunion* (recalling the earlier insights of Maud Bodkin) ‘the tropes that evoke the ritual intonation of prayer’ and which ‘facilitate a transcendence of the external world’s burning chaos’ without actually identifying an inherent spirituality in the text.¹⁹ An idiosyncratic shift of focus was shown in Lidia Vianu’s reductive but perceptive assessment of 1996 which claimed that ‘divinity is absent’ in the plays.²⁰ Critics do not seem to have found a language for discussing the spiritual aspects which they are beginning to acknowledge in the plays but I will argue that Kristevan insights provide a useful vocabulary for doing this.

More recently, in a fourth strand of critical engagement, a keener appreciation of the spiritual impact of the plays has been shown by Elizabeth Däumer in 2004 and 2006, tracing the political and emotional impact of *Murder in the Cathedral* on audiences in post-war Germany. Serena M. Marchesi, in 2009, analyzed the play’s ‘language of evil’, aware of evocations of the negatively spiritual. Craig Raine, in 2006, noted ‘the buried life’ in the plays while not identifying this life as spirituality. Richard Badenhausen, in 2011, used the ideas of Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous to evaluate gender aspects of Eliot’s playwriting but, like the above, did not focus on or make any connection with spirituality as a gender-related phenomenon or as a feature of text.²¹ Nor did Rachel

¹⁶ Katharine Worth, ‘Eliot and the Living Theatre’ in *Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium*, ed. by Graham Martin (London: Mc Millan and Company, 1970), pp. 148-146; Joseph Chiari, *T. S. Eliot Poet and Dramatist* (London: Vision, 1972), p. 121; Carole M. Becket, ‘The role of the Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*’, *Theoria*, 53 (1979), 71-76; D. E. Jones, *The Plays of T.S.Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p.62.

¹⁷ James E. Robinson, ‘Murder in the Cathedral’ as Theatre of the Spirit, *Religion and Literature*, 18, no 2 (Summer, 1986), pp. 31-45 (p. 34).

¹⁸ Randy Malamud, *When Words are Valid: T S Eliot’s Communities of Drama*, (Westport CT, Greenwood Press, 1994), p.96.

¹⁹ Randy Malamud, ‘Eliot’s 1930 plays *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and the *The Family Reunion*’ in *A Companion to T.S. Eliot*, vol 62, ed. by David Chinitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. pp 239-250 (p. 246).

²⁰ Lidia Vianu, *T.S. Eliot: An Author for all Seasons*, (Bucharest: Editura Paidei, 1997), p.181.

²¹ Elisabeth Däumer, ‘Vipers, viragos and spiritual rebels: women in T S Eliot’s Christian Society plays’ in *Gender, Desire and Sexuality in T. S. Eliot* ed. by Cassandra Laity and Nancy K. Gish (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 231-253; ‘Blood and Witness: the Reception of *Murder in the Cathedral* in Post-War Germany’, vol 43, nos 1 and 2, Pennsylvania State University: Comparative Literature Studies, 2006), 79-99; Serena M. Marchesi, *Eliot’s Perpetual Struggle: the Language of Evil in Murder in the Cathedral* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2009); Craig Raine, *T.S. Eliot: Lives and*

Blau Du Plessis who observed certain prejudicial gender assumptions of Eliot in his portrayal of the Chorus.²²

These critics did not find a language for recognising spirituality as a residual textual aliveness in the plays because they had no means of recognising the spectrum of its manifestations. My argument, which I understand as complementing and amplifying their work, is that spirituality exists as an authorially-engendered phenomenon within the text itself and that there are new substantive ways and means of locating and assessing this text-locked energy. Recognition of spirituality as a substantive and assessable feature of dramatic writing affords a new perception of its meaning.

Murder in the Cathedral and The Family Reunion

Murder in the Cathedral and *The Family Reunion* are two plays that encode a potent spirituality rather than being merely literary constructs with conventional religious or pagan themes. Each play manifests spirituality in different modes and registers, re-visioned and re-modelled as essentially grounded in the human. This manifestation can be shown in sections of the text encompassing vibrant areas, corresponding loosely to the 'glimpses, inevitably of short duration' of which Peter Brook was aware but making the invisible visible in the language of text.²³ Remodelling spirituality in the visceral and the chthonic, that is in the deeply human and the earth-bound, casts a perennial fascination and invitation to theatrical encounter in audiences of successive generations.

Vibrant textual areas facilitating the emergence of spirituality found in Eliot's dramas include imagery, patterning and prosody. In identifying imagery as a vibrant area, the reader is reminded that imagery is being recognised here as more than a traditional tool of literary analysis but as a conduit of in-text spirituality engineered by the author. In *Murder in the Cathedral* Eliot's double vision harmonises from the outset in Part 1 with Kristeva's sense of how the spiritual may freight language: 'Now I fear disturbance of the quiet seasons/ Winter shall come bringing death from the sea/ Ruinous spring shall beat at our doors'... The imagery of disturbance and ruin functions

Legacies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Richard Badenhausen ('Drama' in *Eliot in Context*, ed. by Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 123-125.

²² Rachel Blau Du Plessis, 'Gender' in *Eliot in Context*, ed. by Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 295-304.

²³ Peter Brook, *The Open Door*, p. 105. Loosely because Brook was probably referring to a multiplicity of ways spirituality might be glimpsed in the totality of performance. Here, I concentrate on text.

as a literary device expressing foreboding and disquiet among the Women of Canterbury but also channels their profound spiritual unease culminating in the visceral line 'Root and branch shall eat our eyes and our ears'²⁴ Similarly the devices of patterning and prosody function in the same way: as conduits of spirituality within the dramatic text. Patterning depends on textual arrangement and emphasis for its evocation of the spiritual; prosody depends on metre, rhythm and language games for its spiritual effects. All three can be identified separately but, often, as in quote above, such is the density of the creative process revealed within the text, the areas exist one within the other.

Such areas have long been understood as articulating a diversity of dramatic functions but I argue that another of their many functions is to perform as conduits of the spiritual. If according to Kristeva, 'poetic language reminds us of its eternal function: to introduce through the symbolic that which works on, moves through and threatens it', and spirituality is recognised as one of the forces which constitute 'that', then Eliot's dramatic texts confess particular spiritual qualities as yet unrecognised in dramatic criticism.²⁵ The 'it' here is the socio-symbolic order which Kristeva insists may be challenged and subverted by poetic language. In Eliot's dramatic language the poetic functions as an enabling conduit for spirituality to inhabit in certain vibrant areas.

In the process of locating spirituality in Eliot's texts it is crucial to bear in mind Eliot's characteristic, playful wit and sense of mischief, his love of jokes and his humour, his love of presenting the unexpected, even in texts with the gravitas of *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*. This idiosyncratic tendency informs the language games which Eliot uses to evoke spirituality in the text, devices which have not been fully identified in previous studies. Such games involve bathos, rhyme, juxtaposition, rhythm and repetition. In evaluating the spirituality in both plays, my focus is primarily on *Murder in the Cathedral* and my evaluation of *The Family Reunion* is more indicative than exhaustive.

The Animal in T.S. Eliot: Spirituality in *Murder in the Cathedral*

Murder in the Cathedral dramatizes the effect of the falling-out in 1170 of Archbishop Thomas Becket with his former friend, King Henry II of England. The setting is Canterbury Cathedral. Eliot draws on traditions of Greek tragedy namely the Chorus, to characterize the journey of Becket towards martyrdom. It was written for the Canterbury

²⁴ *Murder in the Cathedral*, Part 1 (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1935), p.12.

²⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 81.

Festival in 1935 as a verse drama, performed in the chapter-house of the cathedral itself and directed by E. Martin Browne. Co-incidentally this was the year that the Moscow Arts Theatre acted on the manifesto that 'our guiding line is that of socialist realism' as the preferred mode of expression for drama in such plays as Nikolai Pogodin's *Aristocrats* (1934) concerning the rehabilitation of criminals in a labour camp.²⁶ *Murder in the Cathedral* can be seen to offer an alternative, if complementary, way forward for English drama by foregrounding the multi-facetedly spiritual.

Most of the spirituality in the text of *Murder in the Cathedral*, which may be embodied by actors and found in the areas of imagery, patterning and prosody, is particularly embedded in those passages spoken by the Chorus of the Women of Canterbury, especially in their agonised anticipation as to what might befall their Archbishop on his return to England, the focus of Part I of the play. The dominant spirituality in the Chorus is Eros-oriented if abjectly autonomous and rooted in the body, but there are moments, especially towards the end of the play when autonomous spirituality transforms into the ecstatically Christian-religious, when, in Kristeva's words, 'the abject is edged with the sublime'.²⁷ The religious context may have obscured recognition of the full range of the spiritual in the play. Kristeva's theory of poetic expression, challenging here the 'socio-symbolic' structure of the church, allows recognition of unacknowledged spiritual aspects. That the spirituality in the text is articulated and foregrounded mainly through a group of *female* characters means that Eliot's opinion of women—derided and called into question by some critics²⁸—needs to be revalued and reassessed.

Imagery as a Conduit for the Spiritual

The under-patterning that Eliot employs necessarily functions in conjunction with a potent range of imagery, indeed the potency of image and the rhythm of language has the effect of foregrounding the Chorus despite its minimal inhabitation of text. For Kristeva, imagery is a powerful holding centre for all forms of knowing, an aspect of 'the semiotic which consists of drive-related and affective *meaning* organised according to primary processes whose sensory aspects are often non-verbal (sound and melody,

²⁶ A.I Stetsky, 'Under the Flag of the Soviets, Under the Flag of Socialism', in *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934*, ed. by H.G. Scott (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), (pp. 261-271, p. 262.

²⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.11.

²⁸ Such as Lyndall Gordon in *Eliot's Early Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 137 and Rachel Du Plessis as referenced.

rhythm, colour, odour sand so forth)' and is itself the product of creative ingenuity.²⁹ Kristeva does not treat language in a text as a dead artefact but sees it as part of a rich, dynamic ongoing signifying process.

Imagery in the play-text functions in this way, in three modes: one, as a conduit of non-religious autonomous spirituality expressing the spiritual suffering of the Women of Canterbury, particularly in Part I; two, as a means of expressing Beckett's own spiritual suffering; and three, particularly at the end of the play in Part II, as an intense conjoined locus for both the spiritual and the Christian-religious. For Kristeva, imagery expresses the semiotic process of challenging the symbolic particularly in the agonised stance of the Chorus, pitting their frustrated urge towards transcendence against the encroaching sense of doom and destruction as they wait for Becket to return from exile to their kingdom.

The most potent imagery evoking spirituality is drawn from the natural world: rock, water, wind, air, an old stag, the layers of an onion, apple blossom, blood. The animal world is repeatedly referenced at moments of intense awareness, particularly by the Chorus, as in the extended pericope in Part II, the inner pattern of which will be described in the section on patterning: 'I have seen / Trunk and horn, tusk and hoof in odd places.'³⁰ In contrast to what might be reasonably expected by a Christian audience, or by an audience expecting to see a play with a Christian theme, Eliot subverts expectations by using imagery suggestive of mankind's primal origins: 'United to the spiritual flesh of nature / Mastered by the animal powers of spirit'.³¹ Kristeva sees such immersion in the object as 'a fragile state where man strays on the territories of the animal'.³² For her, as for Eliot, animal territory is rich with spiritual promise. The Chorus segues into a consciousness of their deep-rooted spiritual identity by negotiating the metaphors of their bodies. In presenting such chthonic imagery,³³ a personal psychic area bypassing the Christian is excavated as expressed in his essay on *Poetry and Drama*: 'Beyond the nameable classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life [...] there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus'.³⁴ In detecting the

²⁹ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans, by Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p.104.

³⁰ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 65.

³¹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 66.

³² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.12.

³³ Chthonic, derived from the Greek *khthon*, meaning earth, is used here to evoke nature-bound imagery.

³⁴ T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama' (1951) in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 75-95 (pp. 86-87).

unclassifiable, he reaches back (in an extraordinary imaginative process) towards a deeper level of the human, finding relationality in the animal.

Perhaps it was 'Old Possum', as much as the recently-converted Anglican, who wrote the text of *Murder in the Cathedral*. Virginia Woolf was moved to remark: 'If you are anaemic as Tom is, there is a glory in blood.'³⁵ She showed a sharp intuitive sense of Eliot's fixation with the animal imagery in the text of the play, expressing a sense of astonishment: 'I went to this play [*Murder in the Cathedral*] last night and came away as if I'd been rolling in the ash bin; and somehow filled my mouth with the bones of a decaying cat thrown there by a workhouse drab.'³⁶ If Woolf was expecting some kind of 'uplifting' traditional Christian imagery in the text, she did not find it.

The central image of the wheel, according to Barry Spurr and James E. Robinson is adapted from Lancelot Andrews' Sermon 4, given on Ash Wednesday 1619, is connected to animality by imaging the natural rhythm of life, the sequential seasons, as well as the rhythm of the church year.³⁷ At the start of the play the rhythm has atrophied, the seasons being disturbed and nature is in stasis: 'Now I fear disturbance of the quiet seasons.'³⁸ As shown above, the wheel image is expressed in the patterning of the play, 'the pattern of fate',³⁹ and is an example where image and pattern are interconnected. Becket, on first entry, uses the image of the wheel to evoke a sense of human fatality: '... for the pattern is the action / And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still / Be forever still,'⁴⁰ and again later, evoking a sense of preordained destiny as in Greek drama: 'Only the fool, fixed in his folly may think / He can turn the wheel on which he turns.'⁴¹

The Priests use the image of the wheel to evoke their self-abandonment to fate: 'For good or ill, let the wheel turn'⁴² and later, 'Even now, in sordid particulars, / The eternal design may appear.'⁴³

³⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 47.

³⁶ In a letter to Ethel Smyth on November 13, 1935. *The Sick Side of the Moon: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 5, 1932-1935*, ed. by Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), p. 442.

³⁷ James E. Robinson, ' "Murder in the Cathedral" as Theatre of the Spirit', *Religion and Literature*, 18, no 2 (Summer, 1986), p. 38; Barry Spurr, 'Liturgical Anachronism in "Murder in the Cathedral" ', *Yeats Eliot Review*, 15, no 3 (Summer, 1998), 2-7 (p. 6).

³⁸ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 12.

³⁹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 20.

⁴⁰ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 21.

⁴¹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 24.

⁴² *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 17.

⁴³ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 55.

Dramatically, these images are a part of what Lacan, in reference to James Joyce, calls a constellated 'sinthome',⁴⁴ the artistic shape of the utterance made to the world. In Eliot's case the 'binding [of] the real, the imaginary and the symbolic' engage images of nature used in the Chorus to create a disturbing memory of creation's primal origins. Though viewing with distaste and horror mankind's baser origins, a continuous theme throughout his pre-war creativity, Eliot implies that we are inseparable from them: 'Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning death.'⁴⁵ A reconciliation of forces is attempted in the outpourings of the *Woman of Canterbury*. The answer to the question of redemption, suggested by the play, is to sacralise and bring into harmony the human and the animal.

In this context they remind us of our connection to the whole of creation and our place in it: the conundrum of the spirit and the flesh, the conscious and the unconscious. At times natural images invade the psyche and soul of the *dramatis personae*, expressing a deeper connection.

The *Women of Canterbury*, wrestling with increasing spiritual awareness, attempt to find words for what they can barely comprehend:

Some presage of an act
Which our eyes are compelled to witness, has forced our feet
Towards the cathedral. We are forced to bear witness.⁴⁶

In the image of 'feet' there is a personification of spirit-in-the-body which is a feature of Eliot's re-visioned spirituality in this play. They experience spiritual awareness as a kind of 'jouissance' of the soul, in Lacan's term,⁴⁷ as the Chorus, 'living and partly living'.⁴⁸ For Kristeva, the jouissance of women 'breaks the symbolic chain' in order to speak their truth.⁴⁹ They access animal imagery to express not only their incredulous abjection but also their level of unknowing: 'I have lain on the floor of the sea and breathed with the

⁴⁴ Sinthome: *Jacques Lacan, Seminar 23, 'Joyce and the Sinthome'* (1975), p. 13.

⁴⁵ *Marina*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p.109.

⁴⁶ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 11.

⁴⁷ Jouissance is joy experienced as pain and felt as unbearable suffering which has been endured and eventually sublimated by the sufferer. *Jacques Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, (1960) ed. by Jacques Alain- Miller, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), p.332. Here, Lacan describes jouissance as 'That good which is sacrificed for desire.'

⁴⁸ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 154

breathing of the sea anemone, swallowed with ingurgitation of the sponge, have lain in the soil and criticised the worm.⁵⁰

In context, these animal images form part of the paradigmatic spiritual sequence in Part II where the speakers express their recoil and helplessness in the presence of unthinkable horror which has the effect of dehumanising them to the point of 'self-demolition' and 'uttermost death of the spirit'.⁵¹ The extenuated rhythms of their dramatic language characterise Cixous's concept of a 'subject splitting apart without regret'⁵² and Hillman's sense of 'falling apart'.⁵³ In the heart of abjection, in this distancing from the symbolic order, in their 'malady of ideality', Kristeva sees flickerings of the spiritual.⁵⁴

Eliot's employment of images of the natural world can be understood as an attempt to reinvigorate religious spirituality thereby providing a recognition of a strata of autonomous spirituality which can be appreciated on its own terms. Becket uses the image of 'the hungry hawk' which will 'only soar and hover, circling lower'⁵⁵ to evoke his own awareness of death, which will come suddenly. Hillman reminds us that animal images in the unconscious have sometimes been associated with impending death: 'but no animal simply means death.'⁵⁶ Eliot might have sided with Kristeva in seeing redemptive possibilities in the experience of abjection.

The image of shadows is a continuing trope in both plays. Here, as Thomas says, the 'substance of our first act / Will be shadows, and the strife with shadows'.⁵⁷ In *The Family Reunion*, for Harry, they are 'inner shadows in the smoky wilderness'.⁵⁸ 'Shadows' suggest not only the hinterland of animality and thus unacknowledged spiritualities but also the ineffability of much that is to be experienced by the characters in both plays. The liminality of the spiritualized world which Thomas and the Chorus inhabit is suggested in his temptation towards 'Voices under sleep, waking a dead world, / So that the mind may not be wholly present'.⁵⁹ The Women of Canterbury amplify this 'mind not being wholly present' as they slip and slide in and out of liminality, via expressive animal imagery, in their autonomous outpourings. For Kristeva, though, their

⁵⁰ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 65.

⁵¹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 66.

⁵² Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, p. 90.

⁵³ James Hillman, pp. 64-67.

⁵⁴ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p.18.

⁵⁵ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ James Hillman, *The Essential James Hillman*, p. 254.

⁵⁷ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 23.

⁵⁸ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene II*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1939),p.108.

⁵⁹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 26.

experience is capable of 'an alchemy that transforms the death drive into the start of life, into a new significance'.⁶⁰

Patterning

Patterning is central to the evocation of spirituality in the verse text of *Murder in the Cathedral*. Apart from the patterning of rhythm and sound of prosody discussed below, it takes the form of various kinds of repeated juxtapositions as well as an adherence to certain formal thematic devices.

Choral outpourings of the Women of Canterbury contrast with the more restrained utterances of the priests and of Thomas himself. Through specific juxtaposition in the text spirituality is foregrounded and made dramatic. The silent white spaces on the page when the Chorus does not speak—the first experiential encounter of the play as reader and indicating their silent presence—becomes, when staged, fully a part of the patterning. Given that the chorus is on stage much of the time, the unspoken-ness of the chorus is silently performative and this silent potency imparts a feral escalating energy to the Chorus when they do speak, a kind of explosion of articulated autonomous spirituality from the ground of their being. We are carried, with Thomas, on a tsunami of spiritual awakening. Such an emergence, according to Kristeva, is typical of the way abjection 'draws one towards a place where meaning collapses' but within the act of being drawn 'is a fragile texture of a desire for meaning.'⁶¹

A general pattern throughout the text is the Chorus followed by dialogue between other personages and Thomas which furthers the drama, creating repeated moments of intensity, desires for meaning, when the chorus can explode into spiritually-laden utterances. These moments of intensity happen seven times, beginning and ending with the Chorus, in a circular movement which embodies the central image of the wheel at the heart of the play.

The pattern is as follows.

First, the Chorus opens Part I (pp.11-13, stating a chronic helplessness at 'the disturbance of the quiet seasons' (p. 12) followed by a scene-setting dialogue between three Priests and the Herald (pp. 13-18).

⁶⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.15.

⁶¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.2.

Second, the Chorus (pp. 18-20) shares a chronic sense of void and fear (p. 19); followed by interrogative dialogues between the Second Priest, Thomas and the Four Tempters (pp. 20-42).

Third, the Chorus (pp. 42-44) expresses an acute sense of abandonment (p. 43); which galvanizes Thomas's sense of purpose (p. 44), leading to his sermon (pp. 47 -50).

Fourth, in Part II the Chorus (pp. 64 -67), responding to a shared sense of foreboding, employing a variety of animal and bodily imagery to communicate profound spiritual stasis; followed by Priests' and Thomas's sense of impending death.

Fifth, the Chorus (pp. 69-70) expresses a shocked sense of physical invasion by horror and nothingness (p. 70); followed by the lead-up to the murder with the Priests, Thomas, and the Knights (pp.71-75).

Sixth the Chorus (pp. 75-76) uses images of soil and vermin to express their tortured spirituality.

Finally, the prosaic justifications of the Knights segue, via brief exchanges between the Priests, provoke the Chorus (pp. 84-87), in a sudden and transformative expression of transcendence, intertwining the autonomous and the religious—'even in us the voices of seasons...' ⁶²—recalling the opening speech, employs positive images of the natural world in language reminiscent of *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Anglican *Daily Missal*: 'The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth his handiwork'. ⁶³

This pattern, with its careful preparation for the climactic moments of intensity indicated above, affords maximum dramatic impact bolstered by the spirituality latent in the text. With the Chorus, in Cixous's words, literally 'seizing their opportunities to speak', a juxtaposition of language tropes—the oceanic, rhythmic utterances of the Women of Canterbury—contrasts with the more staccato speech of the men. ⁶⁴

The Women of Canterbury are subversive forces, are at work undermining, through foregrounded gender presence and vocalisation, the serious overall patriarchally-imposed liturgical pattern that loosely mimicks the form and ambience of

⁶² *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 85.

⁶³ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968 [1662]), p. 367.

⁶⁴ Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1, no 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Summer, 1976), pp. 875-893 (p. 247).

the Catholic Mass i.e. the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rites.

Looking in sequence, we can see the process by which this pattern evolves. The explosive opening choral sequence acknowledges 'the pattern of time',⁶⁵ which the play is to evoke through the cyclic pattern of the seasons., a threnodic theme recognised by David E. Jones.⁶⁶ 'Some presage of an act / Which our eyes are compelled to witness'⁶⁷ situates, from the beginning, their festering spiritual awareness within the realm of sensory experience, within the body. Disturbance of the natural is disturbance of their inner spiritual world, presenting as a bathetic antithesis to the religious:

Now I fear disturbance of the quiet seasons:
Winter shall come bringing death from the sea,
Ruinous spring shall beat at our doors,
Root and shoot shall eat our eyes and our ears
Disastrous summer burn up the bed of our streams.⁶⁸

This last line evokes not only the spiritual dryness and inner devastation wrought by acute attenuated feeling—the objective correlatives of 'ruinous spring' and 'disastrous summer' and especially the idea of root and shoot eating out eyes and ears—but also the unsettling sense that nature itself is invading their inner world of abjection and laying claim to it. This agonised sense of bodily invasion corresponds to Matthew Fox's sense of an autonomous spirituality 'rooted in the body', as indicated in Chapter One, where the body is the site of spiritual experience.⁶⁹

As will be discussed below, Sarah Kane, influenced by Eliot whose work she admired,⁷⁰ uses a similar technique in *4.48 Psychosis* to convey spiritual chaos: 'A scall on my skin, a seethe in my heart / a blanket of roaches on which we dance / this infernal state of seige.'⁷¹ The phrase 'bed of our streams' has a connotation of domestic disharmony or imposed infertility. Their troubled clairvoyance is sublimated up in the line: 'I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight.'⁷² The breathless unpunctuated accelerating rhythms of this articulation of dread leads to an acceptance of their role as

⁶⁵ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ David E. Jones, *The Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 62.

⁶⁷ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 11.

⁶⁸ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part 1*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ Matthew Fox, *Western Spirituality* (New York: New Paulist Press, 1990), p.1.

⁷⁰ Graham Saunders, *About Kane: the Playwright and the work* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2009), p.34.

⁷¹ Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis*, p. 26.

⁷² *Murder in the Cathedral, Part 1*, p. 13.

witnesses to whatever is to come and has maximum impact when juxtaposed with the First Priest's brief bland statement 'Seven years and the summer is over / Seven years since the Archbishop left us.'⁷³ The Priests' repetitive language is generally business-like and prosaic throughout the play, not greatly different from that of the Knights, except at times of traumatized intensity when it assumes jerky staccato rhythms, the repetitive consonantal phrasing at such points conveying a pattern of panic and fear such as: 'Bar the door. Bar the door. / The door is barred. / We are safe. We are safe'.⁷⁴

These accelerating rhythms are expressive of woman's 'libidinal economy' and 'a subjectivity which splits apart without regret,' to appropriate the language of Hélène Cixous.⁷⁵ These are rhythms which speak through the body—with accompanying human and non-human bodily images—and are later set against the prosaic, ordered, logocentric stasis of Becket's Christmas Day sermon—'A martyr, a saint, is always made by the design of God'⁷⁶—as in the following spiritual rather than religious pericope:

Under the doors and down chimneys, flowing in at the ear and the mouth
and the eye. God is leaving us, God is leaving us, more pang, more pain
than birth or death. Sweet and cloying through the dark air
Falls the stifling scent of despair;
The forms take shape in the dark air;
Puss-purr of leopard, footfall of padding bear;
Palm-pat of nodding ape, square hyena waiting
For laughter, laughter, laughter. The Lords of Hell are here.⁷⁷

These lines, an example of intertwined hybrid spirituality (i.e. a mix of autonomous and the Christian-religious) in a negative Thanatos-oriented register, are the culmination of the final choral outpouring before Thomas accepts his destiny—'Now is my way clear, now is my meaning plain',⁷⁸ —and typify the pattern of breathless accidie and inner dispossession (if we interpret God as a supra-personal centre of coherence and integration since we do not know precisely who or what God is to these Women)— 'flowing in at the ear and the mouth and the eye'⁷⁹ which repeats and amplifies itself in each succeeding outburst as the Women empathize with the impending tragedy. Both kinds of spirituality emerge through a patterning of the images and the spirituality here portrayed is gender-specific.

⁷³ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part 1*, p. 12.

⁷⁴ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 70.

⁷⁵ Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 90.

⁷⁶ *Murder in the Cathedral, Interlude*, p.49.

⁷⁷ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 43.

⁷⁸ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 44.

⁷⁹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 43.

This is a subjectivity which is invaded and contaminated by abject despair and foreboding, 'soiled' by terror, the word soiled employed again later as part of a continued verbal patterning of ideas—'We are soiled by a filth that we cannot clean'⁸⁰—and colonised by animal imagery which, referencing Kristeva's theory of abjection, suggests fundamental spiritual levels.⁸¹ Kristeva recognised how 'Mystical Christendom turned this abjection of the self into the ultimate proof of humility before God.'⁸² Eliot's Chorus takes this humility to an extreme place independent of the Christian, as if in the visceral imagery the women are reduced to a non-religious state of being in their spiritual suffering. But, though contaminated, this is not the negative spirituality of the Knights or Tempters. The pattern of being torn apart is a recurring trope within these women's speeches, beginning with 'And our hearts are torn from us, our brains unskinned like the layers of an onion, our selves lost, lost'⁸³ and ending with:

A rain of blood has blinded my eyes. Where is England? where is Kent?
where is Canterbury?
O far far far in the past; and I wander in a land of barren boughs; if I break
them they bleed; I wander in a land of dry stones; if I touch them they bleed.'⁸⁴

The implementation of a capacity to bleed in stones is evocative of an inner displacement of sensibility. Part of the patterning is the continued employment of human and non-human bodily imagery to express their spiritual level. The Women express a spiritual anguish felt within the body. This emphasis on the body counterpoints the play's theological register of martyrdom and sacralisation through suffering.

Playfully, Eliot is allowing the Chorus of Women to invade a patriarchal liturgical setting, almost as if compensating for the ban on women participants in contemporary Anglo-Catholic liturgy. If Becket is the priest at the centre of the drama, his spiritual accomplices are more affectingly female than male. Far from being the retrograde gender stereotyping which Rachel Blau Du Plessis perceives,⁸⁵ this Chorus is ahead of its time. Eliot has fun pitting their wide and deep spiritual awareness against the narrow trajectory of Becket's male vision. The arc of their development moves from horrified anticipation, to unflinching witness, and ultimately reconciled and celebratory acceptance.

⁸⁰ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p.76.

⁸¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.15.

⁸² Julia Kristeva, *ibid*, p. 5.

⁸³ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part I*, p. 20.

⁸⁴ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 75.

⁸⁵ Rachel Blau Du Plessis, p. 303.

In Part II, as the Knights arrive to murder Thomas, an extended Choral sequence shows this off to paradigmatic effect. The Women express, in a two-page outpouring, a carefully delineated metaphorical graph of tormented spirituality. Beginning with a sensual awareness of impending death—'I have smelt them, the death bringers, senses are quickened / By subtile forebodings'⁸⁶—the following sequence is of a re-visioned spirituality, visceral, aggressive, chthonic, autonomous, expressed through the conduit of the five senses, continuously grounded in or related to the body, either human or non-human, and finding a kind of 'resurrection' or transformative 'alchemy' which leads, by the end of the play, 'to a new significance'.⁸⁷

This is shown in the sensual verbs which allow a way into the interiority of the women's landscape of the soul: 'I have smelt'; 'senses are quickened'; 'I have heard'; 'I have tasted'; 'I have felt.' Admitting a sense of discombobulation—'the heaving of earth at nightfall'—the women rehearse the pattern of invasion of animal imagery into their deepest being, 'jackal, jackass jackdaw' until, as in earlier passages (pp. 13, 20, 44) an aperçu of where they are spiritually is attained, i.e. at an early primitive level, and they make their appeal to the Archbishop. The extended pericope illustrates clearly the pattern of spiritual stasis, the breathless expression of revulsion and a resultant statement of frustrated perception in the face of social evil.

The juxtaposition is evident again in the prosaic explanations of the Knights after the murder. Manifestations of female spirituality—in Cixous' terms 'singing, burning, liquidating, flowing, gushing'⁸⁸—are set against the First Knight's calm and rational tone of self-expiation: 'We beg you to give us your attention for a few moments.'⁸⁹ The Chorus' penultimate hopeful, visceral and transcendent call to action is the more convincing:

Clean the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take the stone from stone, take the skin from the arm, take the muscle from the bone, and wash them.
Wash the stone, wash the bone, wash the brain, wash the soul, wash them!⁹⁰

The Chorus speaks as one, in the first person singular, allowing 'multitudes' to speak through it, as Isadora Duncan, the dancer, whom Eliot, already an enthusiast of the Ballet Russes, had admired in St Louis and later had observed in Paris in 1910, allowed

⁸⁶ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 64.

⁸⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 15.

⁸⁸ Hélène Cixous, *The Book of Promothea*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 6.

⁸⁹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 76.

⁹⁰ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 76.

'multitudes' to speak through her when she danced.⁹¹ In their dance-like free verse rhythms, the Chorus does not speak as a solo, but as one group. There is a striking parallel here with Duncan's belief that when she danced she 'tried always to be the chorus [...] I have never once danced the solo.'⁹² Duncan expressed her autonomous spirituality through her dancing, channeling it through her body just as the Women of Canterbury express their spirituality through their rhythmic language and through the human and non-human bodily images in their text. This presentation of autonomous spirituality also corresponds to bodily rootedness expressed in dancing rhythms, and the visceral nature of this extended sequence compares with Duncan's Dionysiac sense of being taken over or possessed by a chthonic spiritual power. In James Hillman's terminology she and they are articulating soul, animating it on the one hand through dance and on the other through rhythmic, image-laden, patterned language.

Eliot often compared versification with music and its rhythm, believing that, in great poetry, there is 'a kind of musical design [...] which reinforces and is one with the dramatic movement'.⁹³ He himself also loved to dance.⁹⁴ In *Servants*, though written in prose, I use physicalised dance as a vibrant area conveying the autonomous spiritualities of Virginia Woolf and Millie, her servant. In the dancelike nature of their relationship their common humanity and urge towards transcendence is explored.

If, according to Kristeva, poetic language operates transformatively, 'introducing through the symbolic that which works on, moves through and threatens it' then this transformation can be understood as equally multi-layered and revolutionary in a dramatic text, a notion that ties in with Eliot's concept of the doubleness of poetic language.⁹⁵ Spirituality for Eliot is an essentially human phenomenon, an urge towards

⁹¹ Nancy Duvall Hargrove, *T.S. Eliot's Parisian Year* (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2009), p. 277.

⁹² Isadora Duncan, 'The Dance of the Greeks' (1928) in *Isadora Duncan: The Art of Dance*, ed. Sheldon Cheney (New York: Theatre Art Books, 1969), pp.92-98 (p. 96).

⁹³ T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama' (1951) in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 72-88 (p.76). In 1942 Eliot wrote an essay on the subject: 'The Music of Poetry'. (*On Poetry and Poets*, pp. 26-38.)

⁹⁴ Stephen Spender records Eliot's visits to the Hammersmith Palais de Danse with his future wife, Vivien Haigh-Wood (Spender, p. 49) and there is the story, not necessarily apochryphal, that Eliot taught Leonard and Virginia Woolf to do the Turkey Trot (a popular dance of the day). Eliot invited Mary Ferguson, a Bloomsbury hostess and a close friend, to join him at a dance hall in Baker Street to satisfy his yearning to learn the steps of the fashionable new dances. (*The Letters of T.S. Eliot, 1, 1898-1922*, ed. by Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton, (London: Faber and Faber, 2009) p. 226.) The fact that Eliot was still wearing a truss for a congenital hernia at this stage demonstrates his very real interest and obsession.

⁹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.81.

transcendence, however wracked and traumatised, inhabiting the emotional, the psychological and the verbal. It is encountered through language and silence. Poetic language operates on two levels so that what appears to be expressed on a surface mundane level may obscure a much deeper meaning and truth beneath. As he put it in his essay on John Marston (1934):

It is possible that what distinguishes poetic drama from prosaic drama is a kind of doubleness in the action, as if it took place on two planes at once. [...] In poetic drama a certain apparent irrelevance may be the symptom of this doubleness; or the drama has an under-pattern, less manifest than the theatrical one.⁹⁶

But in a poetic play poetic language serves an extra purpose: not only that of expressing richer, stratified meanings which may be discovered in vibrant areas in text but, at the same time, conveying the drama itself. In prose drama that extra purpose is not necessarily there and spirituality may emerge through looser parameters.

With regard to the spirituality of the *Women*, the second plane, I argue, is Eros-oriented autonomous spirituality which continually forms an under-pattern to the drama as it unfolds, threatening the overtly Christian surface and introducing an extraordinarily rich dramatic tension until the end.

Prosody

Prosody, the study of versification and especially of metrical structure, in both plays indicates a determination to introduce dramatically a rational human world where the spiritual is an inescapable component of being alive, part and parcel of human experience. Virginia Woolf spoke of 'words all glued together, fused, glowing'⁹⁷ in poetic language. In both these plays, I argue that 'soul', as in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, is the glue that holds the words together, fuses them and makes them glow in their prosodic manifestations and spirituality is the intermittent expression of that soul in the text.

Eliot uses a variable free verse line in *Murder in the Cathedral* in a conscious attempt to move away from the stultifying influence of Shakespeare and to access a more flexible modern instrument to suit his purposes. The flexibility of such a verse line

⁹⁶ T.S. Eliot, 'John Marston' in *Essays on Elizabethan Drama* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956), pp.162-178 (p.173).

⁹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), p. 65.

serves as a useful vehicle to portray the spiritual animation of the human psyche in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Language in *Murder in the Cathedral* has a constant rhythmic urgency, an ebb and flow of theatricality. This ebb and flow, the repeated change of pace and emphasis, with liturgical underpinning, and judicious use of rhyme, creates moments which enable the spiritual to be articulated at points of crescendo or stress. Becket's 'Peace, and be at peace with your thoughts and visions'⁹⁸ is juxtaposed in a moment of calm against the Chorus's fear of invasion by the primitive and the beastly: 'What is woven in the council of princes / Is woven also in our veins, our brains, / Is woven like a pattern of living worms / In the guts of the women of Canterbury.'⁹⁹ These lines, using the repetitive 'w'—in 'woven', 'worms', 'women'—emphasising their spiritual fixation and abjection while also connecting the 'council of princes' to their 'pattern of life'—access the stratum of the animal within their collective psyche, situating the imagery, feeling and rhythm of the choral verse in the female body. Spirituality is woven in the human.

Much of the power of the verse of the Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral* arises from the use of lists, repetition dramatically emphasising a pained awareness, an acute enumeration of agonized perception, particularly as the trajectory of the action of the play develops:

We know of extortion and violence,
Destitution, disease,
The old without fire in winter,
The child without milk in summer,
Our labour taken away from us,
Our sins made heavier upon us.¹⁰⁰

Umberto Eco, commenting on the persuasive power of lists, calls the list 'the representative mode' of 'the infinity of aesthetics.'¹⁰¹ Eliot's lists take on the effect of a litany of suffering and regret, not praise or prayer, a playful straining against traditional structures, or what Hélène Cixous calls 'forging the anti-logos weapon,'¹⁰² a feeling of almost sacrilegious uncertainty and doubt which may be imparted to the audience, but

⁹⁸ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 67.

⁹⁹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁰ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 43.

¹⁰¹ Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists* (London: MacLehose Press, 2009), p.17.

¹⁰² Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' trans., by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1, 4 (Summer 1976), 875-895 (p. 250).

also, paradoxically, a kind of shoring up of emotion and concern as if by continually naming the anxiety a certain control may be made over it.

Sometimes the verse has the nature of a rune or charm and evokes the imagery of Lamentations, the word 'horror' repeatedly used. Repetition becomes not a mere rhetorical device as suggested by Sister M. Geraldine, CSJ—'Eliot considered that what was worth saying once was worth saying again'¹⁰³— it is a means of accessing the interiority of the chorus, characterising prosodically the image of the wheel, with its relentless sense of cumulative acceleration through repeated phrasing—'Still the horror, but more horror' repeated twice; 'Than when tearing', 'Than when twisting', 'Than when tearing' all variations of the phrase beginning 'than when' but with a subtle change of gerund. Likewise, 'More than footfall', 'More than shadow', 'More than fury' alliterate and drive the rhythm forward, towards an impending atrocity:

Still the horror, but more horror
Than when twisting in the fingers
Than when splitting in the skull.

More than footfall in the passage,
More than shadow in the doorway,
More than fury in the hall.¹⁰⁴

This culminates in a full-scale awareness of the void. The descent into the void is linked with a descent into the animal. There are the lists of the animal, identified with death and destruction:

I have smelt them, the death bringers, senses are quickened
By subtle forebodings, I have heard
Fluting in the night time, fluting and owls, have seen at noon
Scaly wings slanting over, huge and ridiculous. I have tasted
The savour of putrid flesh in the spoon. I have felt
The heaving of earth at nightfall, restless, absurd. I have heard
Laughter in the noises of beast that make strange noises: jackal, jackass,
jackdaw; the scurrying noise of mouse or jerboa; the laugh of the loon, the
lunatic bird...¹⁰⁵

The use of assonance—particularly the dark, agonized vowel sounds of 'a' and 'u' in the onomatopoeic and sibilant 'Fluting in the night time, fluting and owls, have seen at

¹⁰³ Sister M. Geraldine, CSJ, 'The Rhetoric of Repetition in *Murder in the Cathedral*', *Renascence*, 19, no 3, (Spring 1967), 132-141. Kisti Kivimaa also holds that repetition is the most exploited rhetorical device in the play' in *Aspects of Style in T S Eliot's 'Murder in the Cathedral'* (Turko: Turu Yliopisto, 1967), p.75.

¹⁰⁴ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁵ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 66.

noon', mimicking the tu-whit tu-who sound of the owls, and the alliterative insistence of the sibilant 's' consonant throughout 'Scaly wings slanting over, huge and ridiculous' evokes the gathering hysteria of spiritual anguish, illustrative of Kristeva's notion of 'the surge of instinctual drive, a panting, a breathlessness, an acceleration of verbal utterance'¹⁰⁶ in female speech. The repetition of the earlier phrases 'more than' and 'still the' and, later, the clauses 'I have smelt', 'I have heard', and 'I have tasted' drives home the sense of spiritual dejection and its rootedness in the body.

Thus Eliot presents a thoroughly subversive and revisionist view of tortured spirituality as rooted in animality. This thanatic anthropomorphically-centred autonomous spirituality is at odds with the traditional Christian liturgical certainties of the structure.

As the Knights kill Becket, the Chorus depends on the list as a spiritual comfort-blanket to assuage the effects of horror, guilt and revulsion:

The terror by night that ends in daily action,
The terror by day that ends in sleep;
But the talk in the market-place, the hand on the broom,
The night-time heaping of the ashes,
The fuel laid on the fire at daybreak,
These acts marked a limit to our suffering.¹⁰⁷

Eliot accesses in these lines the interior suffering of the Chorus; listener and observer drawn into a world splitting apart with an awareness of undefined horror. This is emphasised by the impersonal, detached phrases beginning with the definite article 'the': 'The terror by night that ends in daily action, / The terror by day that ends in sleep...' as if the women are maintaining some kind of control on their inner situation by keeping the horrors at arms' length.

Using lists, Eliot creates a gathering intensity of awareness in Becket, acutely, as he realizes his destiny:

I have had a tremor of bliss, a wink of heaven, a whisper
And I would no longer be denied; all things
Proceed to joyful consummation.¹⁰⁸

The gentle assonantal vowel sounds in 'tremor', 'bliss', 'wink', 'heaven', and 'whisper' suggest a man at peace with himself. Becket has gradually reached an economical

¹⁰⁶ Julia Kristeva, 'From One Identity to Another' in *Desire in Language, A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon. S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), pp.124-147 (p.142).

¹⁰⁷ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁸ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 72.

plateau of spiritual confidence: he needs to say no more. The imparting of a sense of spirituality through a prosody of lists is characteristic of Eliot's dramatic style.

The technique is continued in the final attempted transformative and dramatic shift from the autonomous to the Christian-religious in the Chorus's closing speech in which all creation seems suddenly and startlingly suffused with benign Franciscan attributes. It begins:

We praise Thee, O God, for thy glory displayed in all the creatures of the earth, In the snow, in the rain, in the wind, in the storm; in all of Thy creatures; both the hunters and the hunted.¹⁰⁹

Here, the animal imagery —

.... the bird in the air, both the hawk and the finch; the beast on the earth, both the wolf and the lamb; the worm in the soil and the worm in the belly...¹¹⁰

—no longer indicates a primitive spirituality per se but is turned inside-out, so to speak—the imagery is seen from outside, no longer imaging a precarious situation within—but as the affirming outward evidence of a Thee in which 'all things exist'. The soft repetitive vowel sounds of 'in the', 'exist', 'living', 'voices', 'snuffle', 'enrich', contrast with the sharper, edgier, vowel sounds of earlier choruses and the metrical rhythm, though still with that (slowly) accelerating breathlessness, is of a more reconciliatory choral dance. It is an example of intertwining autonomous and Christian-religious spirituality—hybrid—made theatrical by a shrewd dramaturgical choice, positioning it at the end of the play as a 'Te Deum is sung in Latin by a choir in the distance' so as to reinforce the effect.¹¹¹ Here abjection, through a movement of the hitherto buried spirit, attempts to transform autonomous spirituality into the Christian sublime. The dramaturgical sleight-of-hand is astute but the effect is a tour-de-force.

Contaminating Presences: Spirituality in *The Family Reunion*

Spirituality in *Murder in the Cathedral* shows an affinity with the animal—'Mastered by the animal powers of spirit'¹¹²—and that it is inseparable from it; in *The Family Reunion* spirituality is embodied in material, maternal or anthropomorphized images—'the wind's talk in the dry holly tree'¹¹³—or by spectral but embodied pagan images such as

¹⁰⁹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 84.

¹¹⁰ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 85.

¹¹¹ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 84.

¹¹² *Murder in the Cathedral, Part II*, p. 55.

¹¹³ *The Family Reunion Part I, Scene II*, p. 22.

the Eumenides. The dramaturgy maps a tension between autonomous and carefully calibrated religious modes of spirituality.

The animal is subsumed into a facet of a dominant mothering female spirituality, not unlike that of the Chorus of Women of Canterbury, in a matriarchal household to which the male protagonist, Harry, must return in order to repossess and re-embody his identity as a person with mind, body and soul. As he says, in a moment of clarity towards the end of the play:

All this last year, I could not fit myself together:
When I was inside the old dream, I felt all the same emotion
Or lack of emotion, as before: the same loathing
Diffused, I not a person, in a world not of persons
But only of contaminating presences.¹¹⁴

The difference is that, instead of being situated within a liturgical framework, a change of scene and location means this drama of spiritual re-embodiment and reclamation is situated, shrewdly, in the genre of the mid-century English country-house thriller.

Harry, Lord Monchensey, harbouring a disturbing secret, returns to his family after a long absence to celebrate the birthday of Amy, his elderly mother, the Dowager Lady Monchensey. Eliot draws on Greek drama, the *Choreophori* of Aeschylus, with its curse on the House of Atreus, to characterise his dramatic concerns. Harry is Orestes, pursued by the Eumenides. On entry into the family domain of Wishwood, Harry immediately sees the Eumenides:

They were always there. But I did not see them.
Why should they wait until I came back to Wishwood?
There were a thousand places where I might have met them.
Why here? Why here? ¹¹⁵

The way to spiritual growth and enlightenment is to be worked out within the contaminated heart of the family, negotiating a tortuous path through abjection to find the spiritual assurance, that 'resurrection', which Kristeva insists is possible.¹¹⁶ Within this set-up, Harry's drama of re-embodiment as a person unfolds. And it ends, metaphorically and obscurely, with a runic celebration by Agatha and Mary, as if they cannot keep away from him, of his re-birthing.

Imagery

¹¹⁴ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene II*, p. 99.

¹¹⁵ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene 1*, p. 25.

¹¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 15.

As befits its domestic setting, imagery is anchored more broadly in the natural rather than the animal. The recycling of images (from the poems, especially from *Burnt Norton*) such as 'passage', 'door', 'rose-garden', 'sunlight' acts as a network of underlying harmonizing chords as in a piece of music, controlled by what Evans calls a 'feeling from a deeper, more articulate level',¹¹⁷ and is a spiritual thread running right through the action, rather than a failure of creative imagination as put forward by Vianu.¹¹⁸ This underpins the setting of domesticity—of house, home and garden—as the key counterpoint of the play. Dark vacant corridors, vacant rooms, hollow trees, garden mazes, pervade the text of *The Family Reunion*. Dark frightening presences making appearances when least wanted or expected, putrid lingering smells, crossed bones filling up wells, sorrowful voices overheard in bedrooms at three o'clock in the morning, and inexpressible family secrets contrast with transcendent images of sunlight in a rose garden, children's laughter among apple blossom, a birthday party with candle-lit cake, water falling, distant music, and spring. One set of images does not live exclusively in a separate existence from the other. In this play they are constellated around and relate back repeatedly to one central image.

The central (and perhaps most potent) image in the play is that of Wishwood itself, the matriarchal family home which manages to be a holding image for the setting and development of the play, an image of survival and suffering, longing and frustration, meeting and departure. Agatha's 'Wishwood was always a cold place, Amy'¹¹⁹, is an economical summing up not only of the crumbling house¹²⁰ itself but of spiritual barrenness and stasis. Other house-centred images, however, affirm the possibility of seeing into a liminal world looking from everyday reality onto the metaphysical as when Agatha says:

I only looked through the little door
When the sun was shining on the rose-garden
And heard in the distance tiny voices
And a black raven flew over.¹²¹

David E. Jones acknowledges how a pre-used image like the rose-garden affords a 'glimpse of the deepest reality, there refreshment of the spirit, which can come in the

¹¹⁷ Giles Evans, 'Wishwood Revisited', p.162.

¹¹⁸ Lidia Vianu, *T.S. Eliot: An Author for All Seasons*, p.231.

¹¹⁹ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene I*, p. 11.

¹²⁰ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene III*, p. 122.

¹²¹ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene II*, p. 107.

way of ordinary living.¹²² Likewise, the narrow way towards enlightenment and individuation is suggested by ‘the little door’ while the promise of redemption—‘the sun was shining on the rose garden’—also admits the possibility of suffering and death: ‘the black raven’.

For Kristeva, psyches surviving in such precarity, search for stabilisation.¹²³ Although Harry, Mary and Agatha use such images of house and family, they are clearly dissatisfied with them and are being compelled by events to move toward a more transcendent position. As Agatha, formerly ‘the efficient principal of a women’s college’, confides much later to Harry: ‘I had to fight for many years to win my dispossession / And many years to keep it.’¹²⁴ Her dispossession involves re-attaching herself, away from received authority, to more natural spiritual roots in natural forces so that her cryptic utterances take on a shamanistic tone especially in the final rune-like pagan chants which end the play. As if to support this, E. Martin Browne notes Eliot’s comment in an original draft of the play: ‘Great Uncle Harry was cursed by a witch?’¹²⁵

Harry is in transition towards a more transcendental state, with Mary and Agatha not far behind. This transition is mapped in Mary and Harry’s duologue in Part I, Scene II, when after conversational exchanges, both segue into the expression of more knotted dense imagery to evoke their being on the threshold of pained spiritual awareness, as in Mary’s:

The cold spring now is the time
For the ache in the moving root
The agony in the dark
The slow flow throbbing the trunk
The pain of the breaking bud¹²⁶

and complemented by Harry’s

Spring is an issue of blood
A season of sacrifice
And the wail of the new full tide
Returning the ghosts of the dead’.¹²⁷

¹²² David E. Jones, *The Plays of T.S.Eliot*, p. 62. Jones’s insight also supports Peter Brook’s notion of ‘an invisible world which penetrates the daily world’. Brook, *The Open Door*, p. 105.

¹²³ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love*, p.78.

¹²⁴ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene II*, p.100.

¹²⁵ E. Martin Browne, *The Making of Eliot’s Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 94.

¹²⁶ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene II*, p. 59.

¹²⁷ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene 11*, p. 59.

There is a sense of the pain of imminent rebirth and transformation. 'Ache in the moving root' suggest Mary's slow coming to awareness despite unpropitious circumstances imaged by 'the pain of the breaking bud', 'bud' functioning as an image of embryonic spirituality. Harry identifies that burgeoning awareness as 'a season of sacrifice' ushering in painful revelations. The lack of punctuation increases the sense of sudden moments of undifferentiated awareness. Spirituality here has the adolescent nature of 'delirium' as recognised by Kristeva as a malaise en route to the establishing of a more stable ontological position¹²⁸.

As with plays of the avant-garde, *The Family Reunion* may be interpreted as a single image, 'calling into being one unit of complex imagery which is the whole play itself.'¹²⁹ And the image is reflected in the title. All the imagery within the play is part of its dramatic constellation or 'galaxy of ideas.'¹³⁰ Without actually stating that this evokes a depth of spirituality within the text Helen P. Avery concludes that 'the search for the self [...] is the central core of *The Family Reunion*. Eliot felt that such a search could not be successful without a relationship with God.' She goes on to argue that 'because [Eliot] has given out his thought in symbols, his message embodies a great human truth, regardless of belief or unbelief,' and that this accounts for its power in performance. Or as Maud Bodkin put it: the play shows 'the movement of the human spirit discovering, through the stress of bitter experience, a way from one order of life to another.'¹³¹ I would argue that the disembodied god is embodied in the text.

The Eumenides, appearing at climactic moments, make present and extend the promise of the verbal imagery, 'their fundamental ambiguity'¹³² in Evans' phrase, on natural and unnatural levels of performance adding a dimension of theatrical mystery. Their potency supersedes Eliot's stage directions: '*The curtains part, revealing the Eumenides in the window embrasure*.'¹³³ As with Worth and Badenhausen, Evans suggests that 'the spiritual significance of the supernatural presences is a matter of interpretation',¹³⁴ but that this interpretation is likely to reach, as Avery points out, 'the perceptive individual'¹³⁵ if the stage direction shows enough imaginative flair. Evans's

¹²⁸ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, pp. 20/21.

¹²⁹ Helen P. Avery, 'The Family Reunion Reconsidered', *Educational Theatre Journal*, ed. by Jonathan Gurvin, 17, 1 (March 1965) pp.10-18 (p. 17).

¹³⁰ Helen Avery, p.10.

¹³¹ Maud Bodkin, *The Quest for Salvation in an Ancient and Modern Play* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 39.

¹³² Evans, p.144.

¹³³ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene II*, p. 62.

¹³⁴ Evans, p.142.

¹³⁵ Avery, p.18.

and Worth's emphasis on imaginative staging does not diminish the relevance of the poetic imagery in the text as transmitters of spirituality but, on the contrary, complements it and contrasts strongly with Gardner's view that the Eumenides 'are pure symbols and have no dramatic life'.¹³⁶ Moreover, Hélène Cixous reminds us that the Eumenides in Aeschylus are 'the spirit of resistance'¹³⁷ to secularized artistic hegemony for 'there is no theatre without gods'.¹³⁸ Cixous's insight reveals the autonomous/Christian-religious paradigm in Eliot's dramatic writing and the tensions between these which sustain the drama. For Kristeva, employing her theory of abjection, the Eumenides characterise 'one of those violent, dark revolts of being' which though 'quite close, cannot be assimilated'.¹³⁹ Is Eliot attempting to assimilate in this play the clashing modes of the autonomous and the Christian-religious into a Christian world-view? A directorial problem is the assimilation of both modes, given the unhelpfully tame stage direction cited above. A theatrical representation of such revolt was startlingly realised by director Michael Elliot in his well-received 1979 production when the Eumenides appeared as gigantic, looming, spectral presences.¹⁴⁰ This representation suggested that, far from trying to reconcile the two modes, Eliot is saying the two exist alongside each other: 'When I remember them / They leave me alone: when I forget them / Only for an instant of inattention / They are roused again'.¹⁴¹ Harry has to learn to live with their recurring presence.

Images of household decay and putrefaction evoke the house as a source of spiritual malaise, as in Harry's early assertion to his family: 'the evil in the closet, which they said was not there'.¹⁴² Kristeva sees this acute sensitivity to 'sight, hearing and smell' as enabling an encounter with the other.¹⁴³ Harry likens the Eumenides to 'a sweet and bitter smell / From another world'.¹⁴⁴ He is attuned to the family's habit of spiritual denial or occlusion. Fred M. Sander has interpreted the recognition of such images as the beginnings of an individual's differentiation from 'a pathological family process',¹⁴⁵ with

¹³⁶ Helen Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot*, p. 140.

¹³⁷ Eric Premonitz, ed., *Selected Plays of Hélène Cixous* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.16.

¹³⁸ Premonitz, p. 5.

¹³⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.10.

¹⁴⁰ Michael Elliot directed *The Family Reunion* at the Royal Exchange, Manchester; then at the Roundhouse, London; and finally at the Vaudeville, London.

¹⁴¹ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene II*, p.61.

¹⁴² *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene I*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁴³ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* trans. by Leon Roudiez (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 187.

¹⁴⁴ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene II*, p.61.

¹⁴⁵ Fred M. Sander, 'T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*—"Schizophrenia" Reconsidered', *Family Process*, 10, no 2 (June 1971), 213-227 (pp. 222-228).

accompanying schizophrenic hallucinations and the play could be read as a drama of the protagonist's journey, pursued by psychosis, in and out of madness, or in Jungian terms, as 'a night sea journey' through spiritual suffering towards recovery.¹⁴⁶ Indeed when Violet and Gerald react to their brother's startling remarks, it is to suggest that 'Harry must see a doctor'. But if Harry concludes 'Now I know that all my life has been a flight /And phantoms fed upon me while I fled',¹⁴⁷ referring to his having 'just recovered sanity' and that he 'must follow the bright angels',¹⁴⁸ this following of bright angels skews Sander's purely medical interpretation. It suggests that Harry has arrived not only at a clarity of mind, a position of sanity, but is moving toward a transcendent experience of reconciliation and transformation. Angels, for James Hillman, are images of soul indicating 'the urge to survive'.¹⁴⁹ Harry chooses survival.

Such images return to the more positive aspects of Eliot's domestic space, the 'little door' to the rose-garden. In this scenario, April—'the cruellest month', according to Eliot in *The Waste Land*¹⁵⁰—is full of anguish but, paradoxically, also the point of renewal. Sacrifice can be enjoyable, redemptive pain can be liberating. The ineffable can invade the insular world of domestic interiors. The spiritual is forever present as a substratum of the text, emerging here and there in its more intense linguistic manifestations. In the Kristevan sense it is among the many forces which operate on and work through the poetic language.

Patterning

There being no liturgical framework to evoke a spiritual ambience in *The Family Reunion*, family rituals of homecoming, re-encounter and birthday celebration facilitate spiritual candour, crisis and emotional outpouring

As in *Murder in the Cathedral*, a main patterning device is juxtaposition. There is an ebb and flow of the mundane and spiritual, a typical device which Eliot uses in both plays: in *Murder in the Cathedral*, the prosaic rationalising of the Knights contrasts with the passionate interiorizing of the Chorus; in *The Family Reunion*, the characters themselves veer from the spiritually alert as in the Chorus's 'The agony in the curtained bedroom, whether of birth of or dying / Gathers in to itself all the voices of the past, and

¹⁴⁶ Jolande Jacobi, *The Way of Individuation*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), p. 68.

¹⁴⁷ *The Family Reunion. Part II, Scene, II*, p.113.

¹⁴⁸ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene, II*, p.115.

¹⁴⁹ James Hillman, *The Essential James Hillman*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁰ T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land' in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) p. 61.

projects them into the future' to the resigned bathos of ' And now it is nearly time for the news / We must listen to the weather report / And the international catastrophes.'¹⁵¹

Throughout the text the spiritual is situated, almost wilfully, within the ordinary and the everyday. It is as if Eliot were having a joke at the expense of this upper-class English family and is, as argued earlier, a feature of the doubleness of vision within the text.

A general repeating pattern throughout Part I (Scenes I to III of the text) is for example:

1. group chatter on mundane or informative family matters (pp.11- 17) alternating with
2. a serious duologue (or dialogues, occasionally including the Chorus), revealing spiritual insights, (pp. 18-24) which pave the way for the expression of a deeper spiritual awareness in the protagonist (pp. 25-33).

On two occasions, once in each act, the Eumenides appear suddenly and briefly at later climactic vulnerable points, an access into the spiritual made dramatically viable by then (pp. 62; 109). This scheme is repeated seven times throughout the text, gathering in focus and intensity until the final duologue between Agatha and her disciple, Mary, which ends the play. As in *Murder in the Cathedral*, the pattern, with its careful preparations for such moments, allows for maximum impact dramatically for the expression of spirituality.

The seven stages in the pattern can be seen to occur in various permutations over the following pages:

1. pp.11-33, Part I, Scene I: 'Wishwood was always a cold place, Amy', p.11;
2. pp. 34-45, Part I, Scene I: 'waiting for some revelation / When the hidden shall be exposed', p.43;
3. pp. 45-63, Part I, Scene II: 'The most real is what I fear', p.56; **the Eumenides appearing on page 62;**
4. pp. 64-70, Part I, Scene III: 'This is a most undignified terror', p.69;
5. pp. 71-97, Part II, Scene I: 'They do not understand what it is to be awake', p. 81;
6. pp. 98-115, Part II, Scene II: 'This is the first time that I have been free', p.101; **the Eumenides appearing on page 109;**

¹⁵¹ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene I*, p. 97.

7. pp. 116-134, Part II, Scene III: 'I must follow the bright angels', p. 115; leading to the final duologue between Agatha and Mary pp. 134-136.

That he planned out his plays with mathematical precision is shown in a 1948 photograph of him drawing a diagram on the blackboard in his office at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Princeton, to demonstrate the intricate structure of *The Cocktail Party*. It may be that by structuring his plays mathematically he kept a kind of control over those forces which emanated in his imagination from that fringe of indefinite extent.

Harry's return to the family forces a re-negotiation with buried elements from his past—he may or may not have murdered his wife—and this agonizing journey of separation, awakening and awareness 'too real for words to alter' is worked out through encounters with family members and images dredged from a deeper level of his being.¹⁵² In this matriarchal set-up it is the women who hold the spiritual capital, the collective familial wisdom. Wisdom itself, and the awakening to it, is personified by the sudden appearances of the Eumenides: in Kristevan terms, a 'massive sudden emergence of uncanniness' within Harry's revelatory experience of abjection.¹⁵³

Harry's spiritual journey will be worked out in relation to the spiritualities of Mary and Agatha. As Agatha puts it: 'I mean that at Wishwood he will find another Harry. / The man who returns will have to meet / The boy who left' and such a journey into the abyss will mean that 'When the loop in time comes—and it does not come for everybody— / The hidden is revealed, and the spectres show themselves.'¹⁵⁴ This revelation forms a climax to a typical spiritual outpouring of mundane but emotionally-relevant lists. The repetitive nature of the structural pattern of the text, with its carefully managed moments of intensity, characterises the loop in time and when it comes. This recalls the circular movement enabling such moments in the text of *Murder in the Cathedral*. For example, Harry's climactic moment of awareness –

... this is the first time that I have been free
From the ring of ghosts with joined hands, from the pursuers,
And come into a quiet place.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene III*, p.

¹⁵³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.5.

¹⁵⁴ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene II*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁵ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene II*, p. 109.

comes midway during an intense duologue with Agatha in Part II, Scene II, in which growing spiritual awareness is shared, and in this loop of quiet time reconciliation with the Eumenides— a split-off aspect of Harry’s being which must be reclaimed and transformed — takes place. Acknowledging that the Eumenides were already at Wishwood before he arrived, Harry says that at last he is following them and that ‘there can be only one itinerary / And one destination.’¹⁵⁶ In doing this, a new clarity of purposes evolves in Harry’s life and, in Agatha’s subsequent words, ‘The knot shall be unknotted / And the crooked made straight.’¹⁵⁷ Harry must assimilate the pagan elements of his experience to become whole and, in the process., as Kristeva asserts can happen in the midst of abjection, discover a mysterious *want*, which is itself a ‘stirring’ of the spiritual.¹⁵⁸

An extended metaphor is used to access interiority and ratchet up a negative spiritual intensity:

The noxious smell untraceable in the drains,
Inaccessible to the plumbers that has its hour of the night; you do not know
The unspoken voice of sorrow in the ancient bedroom
At three o’clock in the morning.¹⁵⁹

Harry’s admonition to his family, short after his arrival, sets in motion a pattern of images evoking invasion and spiritual contamination—emphasized by ‘noxious’, ‘inaccessible’, ‘ancient’. Harry repeatedly identifies with ‘ the old house / With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning, / In which all past is present, all degradation / Is unredeemable.’¹⁶⁰ This works to disarm the audience (and the reader)—who has no choice but to concentrate on a honed, dense text within the particular space of stage or page—into focusing on the implied meaning, especially when this is embodied and spoken by an actor on stage within the overall rhythms of the drama.

Occasionally, as part of the patterning, language assumes a Lacanian knottedness to convey a lurch into a more private inaccessible spiritual dimension: ‘And the eye adjusts itself to a twilight / Where the dead stone is seen to be batrachian, / The aphyllous branch ophidian.’¹⁶¹ The knottedness is in the conflation of meaning and

¹⁵⁶ *The Family Reunion, Part II Scene II*, p. 109.

¹⁵⁷ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene II*, p.110.

¹⁵⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁹ *The Family Reunion, Part I*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁰ *The Family Reunion, Part I*, p. 29.

¹⁶¹ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene II*, p. 56

image with its double vision of the primordial and ordinary: where things seem neither one thing nor the other. The stone and branch may seem incongruously alive.

Harry's spectres emerge within the interstices of a verbal dislocation of language; he is haunted from within as well as from without. They are embodied presences which speak no language, images and witnesses from another real world, obfuscating the theatrical realism of the play in the 'double-ness' of poetic drama postulated by Eliot, and as Sarah Bay-Cheng pointed out, inviting that aspect of the play 'to be undone by the audience.'¹⁶² Eliot's use of dramaturgical form and poetic language, employing devices such as juxtaposition within the patterning described above, facilitates interruptions of autonomous spirituality, problematising any easy reaching towards a sustained religious position, thereby intensifying the drama.

Prosody

Prosody in *The Family Reunion* also reflects a different rhythm and different register. The rhythm may be slower, the pace less frantic than the verse in *Murder in the Cathedral* yet in its slow meditative deceleration it hints, in the words of Ronald Gaskell, 'at a reality beyond time'.¹⁶³ And within that slower more deliberate pace is a bubbling humour, enervating the text from dramatis personae to the last line. According to Evelyn Underhill, a 'source of joy' is a defining mark of genuine spirituality. As in Harry's: 'Changed? Nothing changed? How can you say that nothing is changed? / You all look so withered and young.'¹⁶⁴

Using the poetical apparatus of rhythm, assonance and metaphor Eliot carefully prepares his dramatic effects to articulate the agonized spiritual awarenesses of his characters, as in Agatha's:

There are hours when there seems to be no past of future
Only a present moment of pointed light
When you want to burn. When you stretch out your hand
To the flames.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Sarah Bay Cheng, *Poets at Play, An Anthology of Modernist Drama*, ed. by Sarah Bay Cheng and Barbara Cole (Rosemont Publishing: Massachusetts, 2010), p. 23.

¹⁶³ Ronald Gaskell, 'Dramatic Anguish' (1972) in *T.S. Eliot's Plays, A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Arnold P. Hinchliffe (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 137-142 (p. 142); James E. Robinson makes a similar point in 'Theatre of the Spirit', p. 39.

¹⁶⁴ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene I*, p. 26. Eliot had a love of practical jokes as a Harvard student and sustained a later friendship with the film comedian, Groucho Marx.

¹⁶⁵ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene II*, p. 102.

Jouissance transmuted and contained in the measured and deliberate rhythms of language like this suggests the momentary attainment of a transcendent plateau of visionary intensity. The alliterative t's in 'past', 'present', 'moment', 'pointed', 'light' and 'want' suggest the ecstasy of the moment of awareness. In her dialogue with Harry, in which Harry painstakingly tries to arrive at a true appreciation of his father's murderous feelings for his mother, and the repercussions of that within the family, Agatha shares, with him, an almost mystical awareness of its import. This liminal moment, when there seems to be 'no past or no future'¹⁶⁶ is presented as a sudden unexpected seeing into the heart of things, which, as Agatha says, 'comes only once.'¹⁶⁷

The brief utterance is an attempt to hold the audience in arrested fascination, instilling a degree of wonder and unease, and gains dramatic impact by being said in answer to a question. The exquisite pain of such awareness is expressed in language of lyrical simplicity, a kind of privileged knowing, as in Mary's: 'These are the ones that suffer least: / The aconite under the snow / And the snowdrop crying for a moment in the wood.'¹⁶⁸ The dark vowels in 'aconite under the snow' and 'snowdrop crying for a moment in the wood', with the anthropomorphic personification of a natural image, hint at profound inner transformation, anticipating the cruelty of April.

Through the rhythms and hypnotic cadences of the verse such as in the duologue between Harry and Agatha, in Part II, Scene II, where Harry and Agatha share the realisation that knowledge and true spiritual awareness can only come through acute suffering, Eliot invites the audience to share this pain and the pain of the dramatic situation so that a kind of collective transference takes place between those who watch in silence in the dark and those who perform and converse within it. In Kristevan terms, Eliot is enabling the spiritual to emerge through a prosody of 'a sole phonic and rhythmic coherence'¹⁶⁹.

Gathering crescendos or tropes of spiritual awareness, as in Harry's last impassioned answer to his mother, intensify as he extricates himself from the family for a new life and a new beginning:

Where does one go from a world of insanity?
Somewhere on the other side of despair.
To the worship in the desert, the thirst and the deprivation,

¹⁶⁶ *The Family Reunion. Part II, Scene II*, p. 102

¹⁶⁷ *The Family Reunion. Part II, Scene II* p. 103.

¹⁶⁸ *The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene II*, p. 59.

¹⁶⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p 162.

A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,
The heat of the sun and the icy vigil...¹⁷⁰

'Worship in the desert', 'the thirst and the deprivation', and the 'icy vigil' implies that Harry's evolution of spirit will not be without psychic pain and, although what might be achieved and celebrated in the next stage may be indeed be difficult and primitive—negotiating the cryptic meaninglessness of 'a stony sanctuary and a primitive altar'—it will none the less be within reach.

Conclusion

Spirituality can be shown to inhabit the text in a nascent, locked-in fashion—with free verse revealing its own aperture on the spiritual—until either rekindled into life in the performative theatre of the mind or alive, onstage, embodied by actors. In Eliot's case, this critical encounter reveals a dominant primordial anthropocentric spirituality independent of the Christian but living alongside it, in contrast to the orthodox Anglican Christian spirituality which might have been pre-supposed. Opportunities are being created in the text for a more autonomous spirituality to show through: 'several layers of the invisible' according to Peter Brook.¹⁷¹ Except that, in the two dramas examined, the invisible is made visible in the text through the vibrant areas of imagery, patterning and prosody.

In short, the vibrant areas of imagery, patterning and prosody in both Eliot plays channel, evoke and dramatize spirituality at an autonomous, non-religious level until the closing moments of *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* where spirituality moves suddenly into Christian-religious mode. The presentation of such spiritual modes in these texts, particularly with regard to their anchorage in Eros-oriented or Thanatos-oriented registers, intensifies the drama through the vibrant areas. An attempt is made to face, through the interstices of visceral drama, the flickering hope of a Christian vision in an increasingly secular era.

New models of spirituality are being presented which challenge, subvert and change traditional perceptions. As for locating this phenomena, there is no general prescriptive code suggesting where spirituality may be found, just the observed facilitating vibrant areas, 'glimpses'; no predetermined generic contours, only various 'found' textual incarnations. There does seem to be a bias toward the feminine as conduit for the spiritual to emerge more forcefully within a dramatic character. We see

¹⁷⁰ *The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene II*, pp. 114-115.

¹⁷¹ Peter Brook, *The Open Door*, p.70.

this in the text of the Women of Canterbury; in Agatha, in Mary; and, although not considered in this study, in Celia Copplestone in *The Cocktail Party*.

Whether this intermittently effusive body-centred spirituality is nothing more than a textual phenomenon of late capitalism is for others to decide; that is not my concern here. My concern is to argue that spirituality can be located in the language of a dramatic text, with such a view supported by the semiotic language theories of Julia Kristeva, confirming what was already sensed by critics such as Maud Bodkin, James E. Robinson, Robert Crawford and Craig Raine and by theatre practitioners such as Peter Brook. An argument might well be made that this occasional locked-in spirituality reflects the contingency narrative of a creative artist's inner development in the period immediately preceding the Second World War. This would certainly tie in with idea, as I have argued, of Eliot's anticipation of an unchurched spirituality, that further evolved post-war. As for a view that, because Eliot frequently rewrote his lines during rehearsal,¹⁷² a discernible and substantive spirituality may not be possible to observe, the identification of small passages, glimpses, or pericopes in vibrant areas which match spirituality's wide spectrum, might serve to placate that position.

Always an honest writer, the primitive and visceral nature of the spirituality in these texts complements Eliot's 'objective correlative'¹⁷³ of Greek drama, enabling his creative vision, or *sinthome*, to take shape. This new model of spirituality, provocatively and playfully re-visioned, representing 'a reascension to origins' for Eliot, as if he were discovering the foundation of his beliefs for the first time.¹⁷⁴ Declaredly intended as an ascent towards the logos and the Christian, the dominant spirituality in both plays, as evidenced in the text, is—existentially, dramatically and empirically—more or less the complete opposite. Yet the spirituality presented is none the less congruent with Eliot's recognition that 'the most primitive feelings must be part of our heritage'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Hinted at by Sarah Bay-Cheng in her essay 'T.S. Eliot: Plays of the 1950s', in *Modern British Playwriting: the 1950s*, David Pattie (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), pp. 95-118 (p. 96). Eliot also revised or moved around passages in his work in subsequent editions.

¹⁷³ Eliot's term for 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of [a] particular emotion' first mentioned in 'Hamlet and his Problems', in *The Sacred Wood* (London: Faber and Faber, 1920) pp. 81-87 (p. 85).

¹⁷⁴ '...to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.' 'Little Gidding', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 197.

¹⁷⁵ T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (New York Harcourt and Brace, 1940), p.49.

If Eliot re-visited a complex spirituality as part of our heritage, such a vision lives on but in very different vibrant areas which none-the-less have remarkable commonalities in plays by Christopher Fry and Edward Bond.

Chapter Four

Christopher Fry and Edward Bond: Kinds of Enchantment

No text, no matter how 'musicalized', is devoid of meaning or signification; on the contrary, musicalization pluralises meanings.

Julia Kristeva¹

I can almost feel the rustling-in of some
Kind of enchantment already.

Christopher Fry²

Alternative Ways of Evoking Spirituality in a Dramatic Text

Christopher Fry, often perceived by critics as merely an exuberant and shallow purveyor of verse drama,³ and Edward Bond, perceived by some as the quintessential prosaic exponent of social realism,⁴ are post-war dramatists who had remarkable early commercial success in Britain with their chosen styles, subject-matter and forms. Fry seemed to usher in a new era of popular verse drama in 1948 which, in his case, although spectacular with productions of *Venus Observed*, *The Boy with a Cart*, *The Lady's Not For Burning* and *Ring Round the Moon* (translated from Jean Anouilh's *L'Invitation au Chateau*) in the West End and on Broadway in 1950, proved short-lived. Indeed Fry criticism is divided over the years into those who are for him and those who are against him.⁵ As Dan Rebellato has said, 'It sometimes seems as if you can say

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, [1974]1984), p.65.

² Christopher Fry, *The Lady's Not For Burning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 23.

³ As perceived by Denis Donoghue in 'Christopher Fry's Theatre of Words', *The Third Voice: Modern British and American Verse Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.180-192; Arnold P. Hinchliffe in *Modern Verse Drama* (London: Methuen and Co, Ltd. 1970), p. 63; Marius Bewley in 'The Verse of Christopher Fry', *Scrutiny* 18, June 1951, pp. 78-84; and Eric Bentley in *What is Theatre? incorporating The Dramatic Event and other reviews 1944-1967* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1969), p. 221.

⁴ As perceived by Simon Trussler in *Edward Bond* (Harlow: Longman Group Ltd, 1976), p. 34; Tony Coult in *The Plays of Edward Bond* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), p. 21; Jenny Spencer in *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 36; and by Delia Donahue introducing Bond as 'a left-wing radical playwright' in *Edward Bond: A Study of his Plays* (Roma: Bulzone Editore, 1979), p.7.

⁵ Voices for the opposition are Marius Bewley (1950), Denis Donoghue (1959), Eric Bentley (1968) and Arnold P. Hinchliffe (1977). These dismissive voices have been

anything you like about Christopher Fry.⁶ Bond, in his turn, seemed to usher in a new era of visceral prose drama in 1965 which also, by the late eighties, had outstayed its welcome.⁷ Their work, at first sight, seems totally dissimilar but on closer examination, reveals surprising commonalities. The post-war delight in poetic language as exemplified by Fry transmutes into another kind of verbal and dramaturgical aesthetic in Bond. Both, in their various ways, find ways of evoking a wide spectrum of spirituality in their work through multiple devices using dramatic language. In their different ways, both dramatists set the animation of the spiritual against the rigidly rational as a core device for conflict in their dramas.

Laughter and wit are continual markers of autonomous non-religious spirituality in Fry's work. It is situated as a positive response to wartime devastation. Viktor Frankl asserts that laughter, as a survival mechanism, was not unknown in the concentration camps: 'Humour, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, if only for a few seconds.'⁸ Not only a protecting aloofness but, with Fry, also a cutting satirical edge. With regard to *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Fry himself gives a clue to the play's humorous register:

The play, though dressed as though after the 100 years war, was for me about the aftermath of the war we had just emerged from. Thomas Mendip was like the tramps I used to see after the 1914 War walking the roads in their old army greycoats, a drop-out. It was a comedy but how could we go back to laughter after the devastation, the striving, the pain, the horror of the holocaust?⁹

overtaken by voices for the defence: William Arrowsmith ((1950), Monroe K Spears (1951), Marta Wasniowska (1962), Geoffrey Bullough (1963), A.C. Ward (1964) and, as already cited, Stanley Wiersma (1970) and Francus Jessup (2002). The theatre journalist, T.C. Worsley (1952), had shown an ambivalent attitude to the plays, heavily critical of style and content: 'whether [Fry's] gifts develop depends, it seems to me, on his finding better fables than the one he has chosen in *The Lady's Not for Burning*' but urging theatregoers, nonetheless, to go and see the play—'Meanwhile no one who enjoys poetry and the clash and thunder of rhetoric should miss *The Lady's Not For Burning*'. T.C. Worsley, pp. 29, 30. Such polarization of critical views may account for the dearth of sustained critical engagement with Fry's plays.

⁶ Dan Rebellato, *1965 and All That* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.40.

⁷ David Tuailon, *Edward Bond: The Playwright Speaks*, ed., (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) 'Introduction', pp. 3-5.

⁸ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1946), p. 63.

⁹ John Gielgud, who co-directed the first production and played Thomas Mendip, said 'after the end of the run that he wished he had done it in a kind of modern dress'. Christopher Fry, *The Early Days* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1997), p.11.

Fry's explanation, though understandably interpreted as a calculated call to 'new heights' by Francis Jessup,¹⁰ ties in more appositely with Dominic Shellard's more sober view that it is 'the undercurrent of bitterness and war-weary enchantment—an aspect of Fry seldom noticed on its first appearance—that intrigues as much as the language.'¹¹ Fry's healing hopefulness challenges the sweeping negativity of Theodore Adorno's 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.¹² His verse drama can be seen as a response to the post-war spiritual crisis.

Paradigmatic of my argument for the existence of emergent textual spirituality is a passage from Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning*:

She's the glorious
Undercoat of this painted world— [...] You see:
It comes through, however much of our whiteness we paint over it.¹³

It is paradigmatic because the passage speaks of a veiled semiotic phenomenon ('the *undercoat* of this painted world') which is potentially transcendent ('glorious' in Fry's phrase) and which makes itself present regardless of the devices society creates to hide or suppress it. The idea of the 'undercoat' which 'comes through' corresponds to Julia Kristeva's notion of the subversive semiotic challenge of poetic language to 'disrupt the signifier', offering up new meanings.¹⁴ That is, the undercoat which is likely to come through (disrupt) corresponds not only to the power of the spiritual in the pluralising depths of poetic language but also to the apposite transmissive power of poetic language itself. As Kristeva says, the 'musicalization [of poetic language] pluralizes meanings'.¹⁵ Spirituality in Fry's text disrupts the symbolic and emerges as a facet of the pluralisation of meaning. The words are said by Nicholas when Jennet Jourdemayne is brought before Tyson, his uncle, mayor of a medieval town Cool Clary and agent of officialdom, to be accused of witchcraft. The accusation enables Fry to evoke a gender

¹⁰ Francis Jessup argued that 'Fry had to find laughter, comedy in the face of holocaust and tragedy and to lift the war weary experience of the audience to new heights'. [Francis Jessup, *Christopher Fry* (Paolo Alto: Academia Press, 2009). p. 25.] Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre Since the War* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 29.

¹¹ Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre Since the War* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 29.

¹² Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, 'Cultural Criticism and Society' trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press [1955] 1967), p. 34.

¹³ Christopher Fry, *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p. 21.

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.49.

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, p.65.

aspect to spirituality in that Jennet, like the Women of Canterbury, seizes her opportunity to speak, in Hélène Cixous's term, against the patriarchal attitudes of the status quo.¹⁶

Although Fry himself can be accused of painting too much whiteness over that elusive latent phenomenon, spirituality,¹⁷ which may emerge in a dramatic text via the portrayal of the human—critics have vilified his verbal style as 'prancing with words'¹⁸ or indulging in 'this line of patter'¹⁹—certain complexities of language can be identified within his texts, the vibrant areas already noted, which 'come through' and can be articulated via dramaturgical means. Not the whole text renders spirituality as a constant embodied and recognizable phenomenon but as an occasional one. In this we might observe some of the common ground between Fry and Bond. The 'glorious undercoat' may not be so readily evident in Bond's *Saved* but is none the less made present through various means, discussed below. Recognizing a spiritual dimension in a dramatic text has a particular implication not only for how a play is understood, directed and performed but also for any extraneous dramaturgical involvement.

The plays to be investigated and revalued in the light of these findings are Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning* (1948) and Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965). The re-visioned spirituality in the two verse dramas of T.S. Eliot gives way to spiritual manifestations in very different registers in the verse dramas of Fry and, later, in the prose dramas of Bond. The vibrant areas of imagery, patterning, prosody and stratification identified in the previous chapter are also found to be able to evoke spirituality in these two post-war dramatists. However, in contrast with Eliot, two entirely new areas are found to evoke spirituality in these texts: linguistic effervescence (Fry) and quietness (Bond). These vibrant areas reveal aspects of Christopher Fry's dramatic writing unappreciated by critics and almost entirely missed in critical assessments of the plays of Edward Bond.

Vibrant areas to be examined as a means for facilitating the emergence of in-text spirituality are: in *The Lady's Not for Burning*, imagery and linguistic effervescence. In *Saved*, imagery, patterning, stratification and quietness.

¹⁶ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1, no 4, (Summer, 1976), The University of Chicago Press, pp. 875-893, (p.247).

¹⁷ Mainly in the long duologue between Thomas and Jennet which ends *Act Two*, especially in Thomas' speech beginning 'It really is beyond the limit of respectable superstition...' on page 54, which serves a political role but not a spiritual one. But in this long duologue the ebb and flow of drama ensures the emergence of a within-text spirituality at strategic points, as will be shown.

¹⁸ Denis Donoghue, p.182. Donoghue believed Fry's success 'one of the more disquieting facts about the contemporary theatre'. p.180.

¹⁹ T.C. Worsley, *The Fugitive Art* (London: John Lehman, 1952), pp.116, 118.

The function of imagery and patterning have been explained in previous chapters. Linguistic effervescence is Fry's technique for facilitating the emerge of spirituality through language in his characters' behaviour. Not simply 'prancing with words' (Donoghue, 1959) but rather a revolutionary means of channelling the spiritual through an expressively potent and intense clustering of images to enhance their dramatic and spiritual function.

Stratification reveals an under-pattern to a dramatic text which harbours the latently spiritual, engineered by the author to emerge in reading and performance. Quietness is a means of evoking the spiritual through strict verbal economy allied with dramaturgical choice of softness of tone.

Both plays were written in a post-war period of social and economic trauma giving way to hopes for a new world as envisioned in the 1942 Beveridge Report. Sir William Beveridge anticipated Labour's 1945 promise of a welfare estate and employment for all.²⁰ The plays mirror the extent to which these promises were or were not kept. As for the social trauma, Fry observes that *The Lady's Not For Burning* was 'about the aftermath of the war we had just emerged from'²¹ and Bond held that *Saved* was 'almost irresponsibly optimistic' despite noting the menace of parks populated with disaffected youths.²²

Four commonalities throw light on spiritual emergence in the work of Fry and Bond. The commonalities are: a relish for the subversive; a loving concern for the intricacies, effects and musicality of dramatic language, especially for poetic language; a fascination with the phenomenon of frustrated and challenged goodness as embodied in a dramatic character; which leads, in turn, to an evocation of an animated autonomous spirituality, rooted in the human; and in such characters' development thereby of a critical disposition towards the religiously-slanted spirituality of the established church. By looking chronologically (from Eliot—to Fry—to Bond) insights may be gained as to how methods of evoking spirituality in a text change and transmute according to authorial propensities over successive years.

²⁰ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 21.

²¹ Christopher Fry, *The Early Days* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1997), p.11.

²² Edward Bond, *Saved* (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd, [1966] 1976), 'Author's Note', p.5.

***The Lady's Not for Burning*: 'It will all be gone into at the proper time'.**

The Lady's Not for Burning, with its playfully-sketched medieval setting—'1400 either more or less or exactly'²³—offers the contrast of off-hand humour and imaginative élan to the post-war regime of rationing and austerity. This is a dramaturgy, the lightheartedness of which critiques the political uncertainties of post-war Britain, offering two subversive and humorous protagonists in disillusioned soldier Thomas Mendip and accused witch Jennet Jourdemayne, as loquacious and anti-establishment in their own ways as John Osborne's Jimmy Porter, and predates his appearance on the British stage in *Look Back in Anger* by eight years. Language which had been found too effusive and exuberant by some²⁴ (although compared by others to the language of Christopher Marlowe)²⁵ takes on a different and more thought-provoking aspect if the verbal dexterities and pyrotechnics are considered as the embodiment and sign of a vibrant and subversive within-text spirituality. Already a clear example of autonomous spirituality in an Eros-oriented register—laughter, wit, enchantment—Fry's bubbling humour provides a lens through which spirituality presents in various modes and registers.²⁶ Freighted with this within-text phenomenon, such language can be seen now and retrospectively as not only challenging the hegemonic hold of prose in contemporary drama and the behavior of its principal characters as critiquing of the status quo but also, with its potent semiotics, challenging the ruling symbolic order with a thrust of the spiritual. In this sense, *The Lady's Not for Burning* is a forward glimpse, with all the clairvoyance of drama, of the exuberant, teenage, subversive political ethos of the 1960s and the reverse side of the potent minimalism of Bond as well as, with its subversive nature, anticipating Kristeva's theory of subversive semiotics.

²³ Stage direction for *The Lady's Not For Burning* in the printed edition of the playscript and in the original 1948 theatre programme.

²⁴ 'Most critics agree that the language is decorative, that it blurs character differentiation, (and that the characters are verbal puppets anyway).' Arnold P. Hinchliffe, *Modern Verse Drama* (London: Methuen and Co Ltd, 1977), p.54. It is worth pointing out that, whereas there is a wealth of academic engagement with Eliot's plays, academic engagement with the plays of Fry is miniscule in comparison.

²⁵ 'Something of Marlowe's dialectical abandon, united with something also of the intellectual acrobatics of the metaphysicals': A.C. Ward, *Twentieth Century English Literature 1901-1964* (London: Methuen University Paperbacks, 1964), p.136.

²⁶ Laughter, wit, enchantment are recognised as markers of authentic spirituality by Thomas Moore who sees such affectivity as 'an ascendancy of the soul': *The Re-enchantment of Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. ix; by Jane Bennet, in reclaiming delight as a notable evaluator of experience in *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 5; and by James Hillman who sees spirit as an animating presence, full of wind, sperm and sparkle—*The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 122.

The basic dialectic between soul and body drives the drama in Fry's play. Indeed, the first word of the play, uttered by Thomas, is 'Soul!', closely followed, by 'Body!' and the dialectic becomes more nuanced, humorous and complex as the play develops.

THOMAS: Soul!

RICHARD: — and the plasterer, that's fifteen groats—

THOMAS: Hey, soul!

RICHARD: —for stopping the draught in the privy—

THOMAS: Body!

You calculating piece of clay!²⁷

Fry's effusiveness and delight in language is paradigmatic of the dramatic dialectic and thrust of the play. To an extent Fry is exploring dramatically what soul might be, its geography and parameters, as indeed, later, does Bond, but in a different register. This flexibility for dialectical expression prompted Kenneth Tynan's remark that Fry's verse was 'not cryptic and solemn, needing sombre pointing and emphasis, but trickling, skimming, darting like a salmon in a mountain stream'.²⁸ Thomas and Jennet exist in a liminal world of spirit in opposition to the rational officialdom of the market town Cool Clary: he, a soldier who wants to be hanged, and she, a young lady not entirely refuting accusations of witchcraft. In conflict with the town officials by their irrational demands, their vibrant presences act as a constant irritant and an unwelcome conundrum. Victor Turner holds that subversive energies may present within liminal worlds, latent reservoirs of *chora*, which can challenge the status quo.²⁹ In that respect, the power of the semiotic is demonstrated in the text of *The Lady's Not For Burning*. Much of the drama and comedy of the play arises from the dialectical conflict and misunderstandings between effusiveness of spirit and the decorous needs of a polite and restrictive society.

Vibrant Areas where Spirituality may be Found

Two vibrant areas enable spirituality to emerge in text of *The Lady's Not for Burning*: imagery (as might be expected) and linguistic effervescence. The latter tends to permeate the entire script.

Vibrant Areas: Imagery

²⁷ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p.1.

²⁸ Kenneth Tynan, *He That Plays the King* (London: Longmans, 1950), p.144.

²⁹ Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), p.102.

Imagery in *The Lady's Not for Burning* draws specifically from nature. This suggests Fry is using the idea of a simple uncontaminated nature to convey the spirituality which is being evoked in the human.

A seasonal rural Spring comedy, the images flow thick and fast: it is Fry's style to inundate the stage, in Stephen Jeffrey's term,³⁰ with the sound of lists of verbalized images as in Alizon's

Coming in from the light, I am all out at the eyes.
Such white doves were paddling in the sunshine
And the trees were as bright as a shower of broken glass.
Out there, in the sparkling air, the sun and the rain
Clash together like cymbals clashing
When David did his dance. I've an April blindness.
You're hidden in a cloud of crimson Catherine-wheels.³¹

Such a speech-act conveys a locutionary import of conveying Alizon's confused vision as she enters a darker space having come in from blinding sunshine and illocutionary effect is of creating a sense of wonder. But the dramatic reason is to fill the stage with an effervescent outpouring via the vehicle of language in the first few minutes of the play, giving the impression of living and vibrant forces at work within society. Alizon underscores the subversive tone of the multi-faceted spiritual in the play, embodied by the two protagonists, showing early on, that indeed, as the bewildered chaplain later complains, 'life has such / Diversity, I sometimes remarkably lose / Eternity in the passing moment.'³² Her innocence and hope in life (she's about to be married) is juxtaposed against Thomas's declaration that he wants to be hanged.

This is autonomous spirituality in an Eros-oriented register as indicated in Chapter One, *Defining Spirituality*, animated and sustaining,³³ especially in the transcendent use of language: 'I've an April blindness. You're hidden in a cloud of crimson Catherine wheels.' Something strains to break through and challenge the strait-jacket of official language-speak. In its dramatic expression of soul, the spiritual revolt towards authenticity as depicted in Fry's play voices, in Kristeva's words, the need 'to keep our inner lives alive, this psychological space we call a soul.'³⁴

³⁰ Stephen Jeffreys, in his playwriting course, used the term inundation to describe a dramatist's way of using excess to convey a dramatic point. *Playwriting Masterclass*, Royal Court Theatre, May 22-24, 2015.

³¹ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p. 4.

³² *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p.31.

³³ Peter Malekin and Ralph Yarrow find theatre is 'a quite consciously spiritual force' operating through language and performance: *Consciousness, Literature and Theatre* (Basingstoke, Palgrave: 1997), p. 6.

³⁴ Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* trans. by Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 200), p.8.

As the play begins, so it means to go on, but contrarily. The young protagonists are blind to the ramifications of the status quo at work in *Cool Clary* and they rebel intermittently against it. Their spirituality is couched in linguistic protest and rebellion. In Kristevan terms, in its reach for a transcendent absolute, it is adolescent.³⁵ Such spirituality is a threat against the symbolic order with its autonomously renewed energy, emanating from the chora. The comparative irrationality of Alizon's outburst—'Such white doves were paddling in the sunshine / And the trees were as bright as a shower of broken glass'—subverts the staid repressive prosaic minimalism of expression of officialdom with random, inconsequential and transformative images of doves ('paddling in the sunshine') and trees ('as bright as a shower of broken glass') where the natural images are transfigured into visions of humorous delight. It is the first expression of that colour which officialdom would like to white-wash over, to repress and phase out of existence, emblematic of and embodying that upsurge of wanton feeling—breaking the glass—the bureaucrats would rather not acknowledge. Such playfulness is expressed at entirely the wrong time and, according to *Cool Clary* law, there is a proper time for everything. The cumulative 'You're hidden in a cloud of crimson Catherine wheels' introduces a note of enchanted, youthful, subversive and explosive rapture yet evoking the ocular, sensory, psychedelic experience of moving from darkness to light. Fry presents untrammelled spirituality as a feature of the exuberant and uncompromising perceptions of youth and the chthonic release of Spring, anticipating the vibrant explosion of colour and music in the next decade, the sixties.

The modern conversational tone suggests boundaries are being breached: the repressive official language of the Mayor and the judiciary being challenged and overtaken periodically by the linguistically spontaneous. The autonomous spiritual exuberance of the young protagonists Thomas and Jennet challenge and provoke the stale bureaucracy of the status quo, their spontaneity in the face of Tyson's officiousness: 'Dear Sir, I haven't yet been notified / Of your existence, As far as I am concerned / You don't exist'.³⁶ Spring itself becomes a metaphor for the subversive and the spiritually obtrusive. This view conflicts with S. Krishna Sarma's suggestion that the seasonal imagery 'everywhere in the play' is there merely to flesh out character.³⁷

Although 'David's dance' is mentioned and earlier Biblical words like 'damnation' are employed, the register of the play is not the schizophrenic imbalance of pagan and

³⁵ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, [2006]2009), p.14.

³⁶ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p. 17.

³⁷ S. Krishna Sarma, *Imagery in the plays of Christopher Fry* (Vijayawade-2: Kamala Publications, 1972), p. 51.

Christian, as Stanley Wiersma feared amounted to the general critical consensus,³⁸ but an elegant and more convincing hybrid blend of the autonomous exuberance of spirit and the religious. For Wiersma the play is about ‘a society unaware of its own evils’ and ‘the two protagonists must struggle to become, or to remain, themselves in such a society.’³⁹ So, despite the Biblical allusions, the spiritual register throughout is erotic for the most part, as it is in Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*. The play’s chronological era is given as medieval, perhaps to account for this overlap, but the zeitgeist is the present day. The anachronistic duality is managed within an imaginary world of rich possibility. Fry sets the tone for the conflict between the poetic and the prosaic as noted. Soul is closely followed by ‘Body!’⁴⁰ What follows, in Thomas’s wry observation, suggests an uneasy, fraught relationship between the two:

Flesh
 Weighs like a thousand years, and every morning
 Wakes heavier for an intake of uproariously
 Comical dreams which smell of henbane.⁴¹

Thomas presents as a personable jaded young man full of a life he wishes to end. Kristeva sees such a death wish in abjection as catalytic in fostering the beginnings of religious belief: ‘adolescent malaise [...] goes along with a return of the religious.’⁴² If not exactly embracing a returning religiosity in Kristevan terms, Thomas, as the play progresses, in the language he uses to express himself, critiques and undermines the more restricted prosaic utterances of the officialdom that threatens to negate him. He grows in an authentically spiritual development as his character unfolds. The imagery he uses becomes articulate at first of profound dissatisfaction with the official linguistic expression:

A world unable to die sits on and on
 In spring sunlight, hatching egg after egg,
 Hoping against hope that out of one of them
 Will come the reason for it all; and always
 Out pops the arid chuckle and centuries
 Of cuckoo-spit.⁴³

³⁸ Stanley Wiersma, *Christopher Fry: A Critical Essay* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), p. 45.

³⁹ Stanley Wiersma, p. 37.

⁴⁰ *The Lady’s Not For Burning, Act One*, p. 1.

⁴¹ *The Lady’s Not For Burning, Act One*, p. 2.

⁴² Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p. 21.

⁴³ *The Lady’s Not For Burning, Act One*, p.12.

Post-war weariness challenges the false hopefulness of the surviving status quo. As David Kynaston put it, there was 'a certain sense of malaise, a feeling that society, which broadly speaking had held together during the war, was no longer working so well, was even starting to come apart.'⁴⁴ Thomas's mordant perceptions query the municipal solutions being offered – 'hatching egg after egg'—in a comical critique of civic sterility: 'the arid chuckle and centuries of cuckoo-spit'.

Thomas's imagery, though couched in humorous terms, is at times reminiscent of the chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral* with their bleak accessing of animal or vegetable motifs:

Just see me
As I am, me like a perambulating
Vegetable, patched with inconsequential
Hair, looking out of two small jellies for the means
Of life, balanced on folding bones, my sex
No beauty but a blemish to be hidden
Behind judicious rags⁴⁵

Thomas's coruscating anger at life, its images expressed in Samuel Beckett-like alliterative consonant-driven nouns and adjectives—'perambulating vegetable', 'inconsequential hair'—is an attempt at ontological transcendence and his despair is a form of hope. As Thomas engages in conflict with the status quo, so does his allegiance to Jennet grow strong and, once desiring death, he now desires life. Jennet recognizes this: 'You are making yourself / A breeding ground for love and must take the consequences.'⁴⁶

Linguistic Effervescence

Fry suggests in this play, through an exuberant linguistic style, that authentic searching spiritualities are preferable to moribund orthodox spiritualities as represented by the established church. The effervescent language dramatises the urge towards transcendence, working in opposition to the more prosaic cadences of officialdom. The Chaplain is no help to either of the protagonists. Dominated by officialdom, his function in the play is to show the inadequacy of the established church in understanding the broad spectrum spirituality embodied by Thomas and Jennet. As Thomas says to Jennet: 'He knows alright. But he's subdued / To the cloth he works in.'⁴⁷ In other words,

⁴⁴ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p.109.

⁴⁵ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act Two, p. 58.

⁴⁶ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act Two, p.57.

⁴⁷ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act Two, p.49.

the orthodox circumscribed spirituality offered by the established church is no help whatever to the two unorthodox protagonists. This 'unchurchedness' corresponds to a more personal search for new post-war spiritual ontologies as suggested by sociologist Grace Davie. Recognising that mainline religious organisations had 'failed to maintain regular contact with the majority of people in this country', Davie finds none the less, from the fifties onwards, that 'the sacred does not disappear—indeed in many ways it is becoming more rather than less prevalent in contemporary society'.⁴⁸

An earlier moment of meditative spiritual calm is strategically presented after the return of the chaplain and before a humorous interruption from Richard:⁴⁹

JENNET: What can you see
Out here?

THOMAS: Out here? Out here is a sky so gentle
Five stars are ventured on it. I can see
The sky's pale belly glowing and growing big,
Soon to deliver the moon. And I can see
A glittering smear, the snail trail of the sun
Where it crawled with its golden shell into the hills.
A darkening land sunk into prayer
Lucidly in dewdrops of one syllable,
Nunc dimittis. I see twilight, madam.

JENNET: But what can you hear?

THOMAS: The howl of human jackals.⁵⁰

The image of 'the sky's pale belly [...] soon to deliver the moon' evokes the hinterland of possible spiritual change and growth for both protagonists and it is fitting that, rhythmically, the play slides into a relative stasis at this point, a feature of the play's musicality. An unspoken spiritual awareness is codified in imagery of birth and awakening. The phrase 'Nunc dimittis' mimicks the dropping of the metaphorical dewdrops, the gradual plunging of the land into darkness and the arrival of both protagonists at a plateau of deep calm. The musicalized cadences in the dialogue towards a sense of disrupted enchantment is suggestive of the autonomous spirituality of wit and laughter but underpinned with a Bond-like realistic awareness in 'The howl of human jackals'.

⁴⁸ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996 [1994]), pp. 42/43.

⁴⁹ This moment was caught superbly in a staged reading of *The Lady's Not for Burning*, directed by Charlotte Donachie at the Park Theatre, Finsbury Park, London, on 29 June, 2016.

⁵⁰ *The Lady's Not for Burning*, Act Two, p. 49.

The subsequent juxtaposition of Richard's 'Do you mind? I have to scrub the floor?' offsets the depth of reflection reached by the two protagonists, as well as introducing comic relief.

Jennet's imagery teasingly questions her notional connection to the natural world:

They say I have only
To crack a twig, and over the springtime weathercocks
Cloudburst, hail and gale, whatever you will,
Come leaping fury foremost.⁵¹

This provokes Tyson's urbane, repressive 'The report / May be exaggerated, of course, but where there's smoke...' ⁵² Jennet's imagery of cloudburst, hail and gale, although said in irony, nevertheless conveys the impact of her original vision which capsizes the world-view of Cool Clary. Fry's dramatic language here is a plea for tolerance of those who are beyond the accepted norm and the development of the drama is reminiscent of the recorded trial of Joan of Arc: the profoundly inspired versus the narrow-mindedly mundane. Fry may have been influenced by Bernard Shaw's *St Joan* in that a gendered spirituality is here on trial but it is as likely he had in mind Jennet Brierley who was acquitted of witchcraft in the Salmesbury witch trials of 1612.⁵³

Undaunted, Jennet, as if to prove a point, reveals the persistent undercoat of memory and tradition which officialdom would white-wash out of existence:

They also say that I bring back the past;
For instance, Helen comes,
Brushing the maggots from her eyes,
And, clearing her throat of several thousand years,
She says. 'I loved...'; but cannot any longer
Remember names.⁵⁴

Tyson's 'Whatever you say will be taken down in evidence / Against you; am I making myself clear?' is typical of the dialectical pattern of vividly-imaged autonomous erotic spirituality in conflict with a dismissive prosaic reductionism. The play sustains a paradigm of subversive humorous individual visioning against curt officialese denial

⁵¹ *The Lady's Not For Burning, Act One*, p. 24. Here Jennet's singularity of vision recalls George Bernard Shaw's portrayal of St Joan although Jennet is more provocative than St Joan.

⁵² *The Lady's Not For Burning, Act One*, p. 25.

⁵³ The Salmesbury witches of 1612 were three women who were found not guilty at Lancaster Assizes of cannibalism and child murder. Judge and judge dismissed the case and freed the accused: 'Witch Trials', Luke Barber, August 19, 2016, <<https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/witch-trials-pendle-salmesbury-remembered-18744>> [accessed 19.9.2020]

⁵⁴ *The Lady's Not For Burning, Act One*, p. 25.

demonstrating Kristeva's theory of poetic language challenging the symbolic.⁵⁵ Unlike the less conflicted portrayal in the first edition which I am using for this chapter, Fry intensified the conflict between Tyson and Jennet in the second edition of the play, adding extra vituperative dialogue for Tyson.⁵⁶ Such effervescent erotic spirituality emerges within text in a very different manner to that of Eliot. Jennet expresses her courageous disdain in the register of an Eros-oriented autonomous spirituality of mocking laughter and wit.

Jennet's exuberant irrationality challenges the hegemonic world-view of Tyson.⁵⁷ Even more so in her

They tell one tale, that once, when the moon
Was gibbous and in a high dazed state
Of nimbus love, I shook a jonquil's dew
On to a pearl and let a cricket chirp
Three times, thinking of pale Peter:
And there Titania was, vexed by a cloud
Of pollen, using the sting of a bee to clean
Her nails and singing, as drearily as a gnat,
'Why try to keep clean?'⁵⁸

The 'uncleanness' of Jennet's language, drawing on an arsenal of nature imagery and magical references in effervescent language to vex the status quo, encourages Thomas to extrapolate in kind until Tyson, exasperated, cries:

That's enough!
Terrible, frivolity, terrible blasphemy,
Awful unorthodoxy. I can't understand
Anything that's being said. Fetch a constable.
The woman's tongue clearly knows the flavour
Of *spiritu maligno*. The man must be
Drummed out of town.⁵⁹

Cool Clary officialdom, in its relation with the Church, regards Jennet's presence as malign. The remark about her tongue 'clearly knowing the flavor of *spiritu maligno*' suggests a bias against feminine spirituality as something 'other', using words elsewhere

⁵⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 81.

⁵⁶ *The Lady's Not For Burning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 24,25.

⁵⁷ Something of this deeply-felt verbal effusiveness is a feature of Anthony Neilson's *Unreachable* (2016) which maps the spiritual trauma of creativity among artists and technicians trying to complete a new film where the director, relentlessly in search of the ineffable, is looking for the 'perfect light' in which to shoot it. The character of Ivan, 'The Brute', erupts on stage (literally out of a suitcase) and threatens to unbalance the whole narrative with hilarious Christopher Fry-like tirades emblematic of his own search for meaning.

⁵⁸ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p. 25.

⁵⁹ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p. 26.

in the play like rustling, contaminated, frivolity to describe it. Jennet satirizes the church/state fear of feminine spirituality's relationship with nature and the body: 'I shook a jonquil's dew / On to a pearl and let a cricket chirp three times / Thinking of pale Peter'. In showing Jennet's satirical amusement, Fry is emphasizing her benign innocence. In misattributing spirituality in a thanotic register to Jennet, Tyson reveals the pernicious aspect of repressive human power, itself an example of what he professes to abhor.

Tyson's behavior characterizes the disenchantment suggested by Max Weber as a symptom of our age and possibly of the attitude of some of Fry's critics.⁶⁰ Weber's enchanted garden, rejected by Protestant certainty, is continually evoked by Fry. Jennet and Thomas characterize a contrasting life-affirming, and therefore threatening, sense of opposition to the relentlessly civic which Margaret interprets as 'enchantment': 'I can almost feel the rustling in of some / Kind of enchantment already'. Clearly Margaret is irritated by Jennet's autonomous spirituality, expressed in her effervescent language, and, like the officialdom of Cool Clary, sees it as something which will unbalance and subvert the status quo. Margaret's use of 'rustling' can be seen as a meta-textual commentary on the evocative spiritual power of musicalized language. In this sense, the exuberant spirituality in the text of *The Lady's Not for Burning* has a political function in showing how a repressive status quo may be challenged.

Jennet's arcane nature imagery parodies, deliberately, the moribund spiritual world she moves in:

I have wiped my shoes so that I shouldn't bring in
The soft Egyptian sand which drifts at night,
They tell me, into the corners of my house
And then with the approach of naked morning
Flies into the fire like a shadow of goldfinches.⁶¹

Such expression of otherness elicits Tyson's repetitive, censorious 'This will be discussed / At the proper time—'.⁶² Fry seems to slyly parody an authoritarian repression of freedom of speech while articulating a revolt against the bureaucracy of the established church.

Some sympathy is shown by Nicholas, Tyson's nephew, as if the sprightly verbalized enchantment might be enjoyably catching:

We get one gulp
Of dubious air from our hellmost origins
And we have to bung up the draught with a constable.

⁶⁰ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fishoff (London: Methuen and Co Ltd, 1963 [1922]), p. 270.

⁶¹ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p.24.

⁶² *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p. 24.

It's a terribly decontaminating life.⁶³

And later, 'The best / Thing we can do is to make wherever we've lost in / look as much as home as we can.'⁶⁴ 'In the enchanted world,' according to Charles Taylor, 'the meaning exists already, outside of us, prior to contact; it can take us over, we can fall into its field of force.'⁶⁵ Fry has fun showing dramaturgically, through characters like Margaret and Nicholas, officialdom being taken over by that force. Suitably contaminated, they must accept their natural condition and enjoy it. Nicholas's spiritual development—'I was on / Business of the soul, my sweetheart, business / Of the soul'⁶⁶, he says to his reprimanding mother—shadows that of Thomas and Jennet. Fry is not privileging either protagonist. But both Margaret and Nicholas are aware of the hybrid spirituality which is 'rustling in' and Margaret clearly does not like it.

The range of nature imagery throughout the first act—sunlight, blindness, moon, vegetable, strawberry—and the accompanying epithets—spring, April, gibbous, perambulating, seraphic—evokes an uncompromising, subversive layer of playful autonomous spirituality in direct conflict with the more prosaic dismissive attitudes of officialdom. The dialectic of the effusively spiritual with proper, curt civic behaviour is the thematic heart of the comedy. The images pave a stratified bedrock of ongoing erotic spiritual reference throughout the text until the end of the play.

Saved: 'Slowly a baby starts to cry'.⁶⁷

Kristeva's sense of the disruption of the symbolic by drives accruing in the semiotic affords a way into understanding how spirituality emerges and operates in the playscript of *Saved*. Throughout thirteen scenes of apparent accumulating nihilism, spirituality intermittently surfaces via a musicalised dramaturgical pattern and realizes itself in comparative silence in its denouement. If Bond's play appears to exemplify Adorno's 'no poetry after Auschwitz' argument, Kristeva's theory offers a nuanced understanding of the riches of the play's musicalized text: Bond's Bartok to Fry's Britten, perhaps.

⁶³ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act One, p.26. That the effervescent language is 'caught' by Nicholas and even by Keble Tyson might seem one of the weaker aspects of Fry's dramaturgy. But it is as if Fry is making a subtle point about spirituality only being intermittently conduited through particular language devices and at seemingly random moments.

⁶⁴ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act Three, p. 90.

⁶⁵ Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Belnap Press, 2011), p.291.

⁶⁶ *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act Two, p. 46.

⁶⁷ Edward Bond, *Saved*, Scene Four (London: Methuen Drama, [1966] 2000), p.36.

The play was written some seventeen years later than *The Lady's Not For Burning* when British society was emerging from post-war austerity into an uncertain period of financial improvement for some and educational uncertainty for others. Young people in 1965, as stipulated in the 1944 Education Act, might leave school at fifteen; it was not until 1972 that the school leaving age was raised to 16. For Bond, a professed atheistic humanist, much of the social evil in society is perpetuated by society itself and affects the growth and development of the individual. The root cause of this, for Bond, is capitalism. In this *Saved* is a direct critique of 1960s Britain and the spiritual crisis observed by the sociologists remains unresolved. The play was refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain unless severe cuts were made, which Bond refused to do. The ensuing debacle, in which the play was given private performances at the Royal Court, marked a turning point in theatre history with the eventual creation of the Theatres Act of 1968.⁶⁸

With this view it may be surprising that vestiges of a hopeful spirituality emerge in the text of *Saved* at all. But Bond himself called the play 'almost irresponsibly optimistic'.⁶⁹ The title is far from ironic: in regressive ways the characters *are* saved within their liminoid existence in one way or another. Bond himself refers to this as an effect of 'the gap'.⁷⁰ For Bond, human behaviour is predicated on nothingness but despite this there remains a surviving subjectivity which creates a new way of being in the world. The complex concept of gap is similar to Kristeva's void, out of which many positives (and negatives) may emerge, one of which, I argue, is the spiritual. 'Negotiating the gap is a social process', writes Bond.⁷¹ 'The gap is in tension because of the relationship between the real and the ideological, and this is the tension of 'being'. The gap is also the site of our individual story, which is partly our specific biography and partly the events in ideology.'⁷² If it is the propensity of the gap to be filled with ideology, why not also with the spiritual, as set out in Chapter 1, as part of that story? Bond's concept of radical innocence allows room for this interpretation.

Bond's ideological 'gap' acknowledges aspects of spirituality that are socially conceived. His characters are 'liminoid' rather than 'liminal'—without the universalized

⁶⁸ The Royal Court producers of *Saved* were individually prosecuted by the Lord Chamberlain and were fined. After the Theatres Act was passed the play was produced in the main house in 1969. Bond had been discovered and nurtured as a playwright at the Royal Court.

⁶⁹ Edward Bond, 'Author's Note' to *Saved*, p.5.

⁷⁰ David Tuillon, *Edward Bond: The Playwright Speaks* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p.137.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 335.

⁷² Edward Bond, 'The Seventh of January Sixteen Hundred and Ten', *The Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and State* (London: Methuen, 2000), p.176.

associations of a productive threshold (as in Fry)—because their lives on a South London estate are shown to exist but not thrive within their own sacred corner of responsible society: a variety of closed rooms or spaces in the local park in a community which is ‘policing itself’.⁷³ Martin Esslin argues that Bond’s characters are ‘people who live on the fringes of criminality in a world almost sub-human.’⁷⁴ But, if being on the margins is not one that assumes positive change, it is Bond’s impulse to indicate the flicker of humanity still left in some of them and, doing this, enable an autonomous spirituality to emerge in either erotic or thanotic register via the intensity of the dramaturgy.

Much of the action takes place on ‘a bare stage’, evoking a potentially soulless existence. In the opening stage directions to Scene One, after an enumeration of the sparse furniture in the living-room—table, sofa, TV, armchair, two chairs— there is the word ‘Empty’.⁷⁵ Although the room is meant to be lived in it is ‘empty’. With Bond, this is an indicator of a spiritual void, not simply an indication that no one has entered it yet. It is profoundly symbolic that when Len ‘comes in’ ‘He goes straight out again’. Ostensibly Len (we learn) has gone into the wrong room, thinking it’s the bedroom. A dramaturgy of unpredictability is set from the beginning, evoking in dramatic terms the precarity of Kristeva’s ‘language inscribed upon a void’.⁷⁶

Within this sparse performance setting Turner’s hidden subversive energies depend on social conflict to emerge. As he says, such liminality (and by implication liminality evoked by dramatic writing) involves ‘the stripping of statuses, the demolishing of structures...’.⁷⁷ The baby’s status becomes stripped of meaning, a social group implodes on itself. Bond himself states that in his writing of *Saved*, ‘there was always the possibility that violence could really explode’.⁷⁸ This comment refers to an authorial sense he had while walking through a London park. The violence portrayed in the play is cannily prescient of current youth murders in various South London parks.⁷⁹ But as Bond says, he had never heard of a baby being stoned to death in a park although ‘I have

⁷³ Tuailon, p.74.

⁷⁴ Martin Esslin, ed., *The New Theatre of Europe.4* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc, 1970), p. xv.

⁷⁵ *Saved*, Scene One, p.11.

⁷⁶ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p.34.

⁷⁷ Turner, *The Anthology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), p. 107.

⁷⁸ Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, *Edward Bond: A Companion to the Plays* (London: TQ Publications, 1978), p. 9.

⁷⁹ See one of many accounts in *The Croydon Advertiser*, 3.11.17:

<https://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/news/local-news/teenager-stabbed-death-betts-park-724165> [accessed January 23, 2019]

heard of babies being bombed to death'.⁸⁰ Turner also asserts that, within the same liminal setting, opposing energies may emerge: 'the scene and time for the emergence of society's deepest values.'⁸¹ I am arguing that we see these deepest values emerge in flickers of autonomous spirituality (in vibrant areas) among the more dystopian negative behaviour in the liminal world of *Saved*.

A young man, Len, befriends a feckless young woman, Pam, whose crying baby comes to disturb the equilibrium of a dysfunctional working-class milieu. In this setting, Len remains a positive caring presence, in contrast to the other semi-literate and violent characters who stone a baby to death in its pram, the event witnessed by Len. As Bond says, Len 'lives with people at their most hopeless (that is the point of the final scene) and does not turn away from them. I cannot imagine an optimism more tenacious or honest than this.'⁸² Len's optimism, in Kristevan terms, continually disrupts the negative symbolic of the dramatic narrative, offering a slight, almost apologetic spiritual presence of care and love. Len's spirituality nevertheless is readily sacrificed to terse monosyllabic conversations circling and re-circling in matters of sex, money and booze.

LEN: 'Ow many blokes yer 'ad this week?

PAM: We ain't finished Monday yet!

LEN: We take that into consideration.

PAM: Saucy bugger!⁸³

The acme of transcendent culture is to read the Radio Times.

The action of the play therefore offsets Len's attraction and concern for Pam and her illegitimate baby against the indifference of family and friends to her predicament which escalates into her baby being stoned to death by the real father, Fred, and his mates.

Unremarkably, the concept of spirituality is missing in academic engagement with the plays of Edward Bond even though, in an impromptu and unrecorded conversation with Bond during a break in a symposium at Warwick University in 2012,⁸⁴ Bond expressed sympathy with the idea of an autonomous spiritual aspect to his work and re-affirmed his belief in 'the triumph of the human spirit' over violence and chaos.⁸⁵ He restated his belief in 'the strength of human beings to provide answers'.⁸⁶ He said, in

⁸⁰ Malcolm Hay and Phillip Roberts, p. 9.

⁸¹ Turner, p.102.

⁸² *Saved*, 'Author's Note', p.5.

⁸³ *Saved*, Scene One, p. 16.

⁸⁴ *Bond @50: The Work of Edward Bond*, A Symposium, Warwick University, Friday November 2, 2012.

⁸⁵ Malcolm Hay and Phillip Roberts, p. 56; David Tuallion, p.74.

⁸⁶ Tony Coult, *The Plays of Edward Bond* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), p 21.

conversation, that his characters 'were good people making difficult choices' in an austere capitalist society.⁸⁷ Simon Trussler comes closest to postulating a spiritual aspect in Bond's plays without identifying it as such: 'he exhibits, despite his avowed atheism, an unquenchable faith in humanity's spark and the slender but real possibilities for redemption.'⁸⁸ What Bond would disagree with is the sense of a divine spark: 'If the theory of the spark were true, how would that guide us through the desperately-needed reorganization of society?'⁸⁹ This does not mean that Trussler is wrong with what he finds in the plays or that an inherent autonomous spirituality cannot be found within the text. Bond's atheistic beliefs may lead him to assert 'What is unnecessary is to put 'a soul' in the objective world—to say that human beings can reach an accord with the hidden holiness or godliness of the world.'⁹⁰ Yet, ambivalently, Bond uses the word soul in other contexts when talking about his work, referring to post-war devastation as 'ground zero of the human soul'.⁹¹

Vibrant Areas: Imagery

Imagery in Bond's *Saved* is not as fecund and expansive as in Fry: there is a different dramatic purpose. Bond is showing a repressed working-class society whose denizens are not loquacious. Much weight is attached to the symbolic meaning of the image in a repressive social setting. Bond has developed his own lexicon for the interpretation of his dramatic imagery but there is no mention of spirituality as yet as being part of that.⁹² In Fry, the imagery reflects the life-giving authentic spirituality of the youthful protagonists and characters sympathetic to them e.g. Alizon and Richard, in opposition to the clipped denying vision of the family of officials. In Bond, the seemingly opaque minimal imagery in the text—baby, pram, room, door, stone, light, dark, chair—arguably reflects the absence of a depth of animated spirituality existing within the characters' narrowly-visioned lives in 'the brick desert'⁹³ of this South London environment. But each does, in its silent inanimate way, evoke the promise of growth

⁸⁷ His off-the-cuff spoken arguments were consistent with his written views and, for this reason, more valuable than a pre-arranged meeting.

⁸⁸ Simon Trussler, *Edward Bond* (Harlow: Longman Group Ltd, 1976), p.4.

⁸⁹ Bond, 'The Roman and the Establishment Figleaf', *The Guardian*, November 3, 1980, p.89.

⁹⁰ Bond, *Selections from the Notebooks of Edward Bond*, vol 2, 1980-1995, ed. by Ian Stuart (London: Methuen, 2001), p.124.

⁹¹ Tuailon, p. 17.

⁹² Spirituality is not mentioned as an aspect of his stagecraft in *Edward Bond: The Playwright Speaks*, a series of interviews with Bond, conducted and edited by David Tuailon (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁹³ Bond quoted in Coult, p. 31.

and redemption. Richard Scharine makes the interesting observation that 'each Bond play has a dominant image in the light of which all other actions must be considered'.⁹⁴ This observation is useful in understanding the relationality of images to the dramatic conflict generated around the stoning of the baby but tends to shift the focus away from a spiritual resonance. Such relational images frequently appear in the stage directions, as in *Kane*, but not as lyrically.

The pram and the chair can be understood as stabilising images in the basic homeostatic set-up for this microcosm of working-class society in South London. Their physical precarity is offset by the stoning of the baby in Scene Six (the pram is pushed about, possibly damaged) and the accidental breaking of the chair in Scene Eleven. In themselves they image the precarious and primitive, almost tokenistic, level of autonomous spirituality submerged within the family life of this community.

The baby, with its inchoate crying, is a potent image and symbol of embryonic autonomous spirituality not recognized, valued or given a chance to develop and grow. As the five youths—Fred, Barry, Colin, Pete, Mike—stone the baby (its mother Pam having previously drugged its crying with aspirin) they are also stoning their own vulnerability and proclivity to develop and grow. The youths do not see the true person of the baby:

MIKE. What kid?
BARRY. Not me!
COLIN. I ain't seen no kid.⁹⁵

For them the baby is reframed in several different images: animal, fairground dummy, yeller-nigger, yid, Guy Fawkes, bastard, 'bleeding little sod'.

BARRY. Piss on it! Piss on it!
COLIN. Gungy slasher.
MIKE. Call the R.S.P.C.A.⁹⁶

This self-reflexive violence portrays a social group in spiritual stasis or stagnation. The violence is unpremeditated, comes out of the blue. The treatment of the baby in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* becomes a useful critical tool to understand what Bond is doing in *Saved*.

Bond's baby is an image that carries a symbolic power not lost on Kane, as will be explored in the later chapter. Cate's attitude to the baby she rescues from the war zone

⁹⁴ Richard Scharine, *The Plays of Edward Bond* (London: Associated University Press, 1976), p.273.

⁹⁵ *Saved*, Scene Six, p.68.

⁹⁶ *Saved*, Scene Six, p. 71.

is more compassionate than Pam's although, at first, she regards it with a similar perplexity:

CATE: Don't know what do with it.

IAN: I'm cold.

CATE: Keeps crying.⁹⁷

Cate's concern for the baby segues into a discussion on life after death, autonomous spirituality moving into the religious mode. She buries the baby under the floor with a makeshift cross. Ian in his desperate agony, 'lifts the baby's body out' and eats it. In both scenes, the destruction of vulnerability and of innocence has a long previous tradition in world drama (*Medea* itself) and in modern poetry. As Yeats put it: 'The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned.'⁹⁸ In each play the intent if visceral obtains in a symbolic register of often apparent in production. In the original production, the stoning was mimed. In the recent Styx production of *Blasted*, a bulging plastic bag full of water burst when Ian bit into it, creating a striking *coup de theatre*.⁹⁹ Representation on stage was all the more powerful for being symbolically suggested. If Kane sacramentalises the baby's death, with accompanying cannibalistic overtones, Bond is deeply concerned with such destruction: 'Nobody knows how to deal with innocence. People are afraid of it.'¹⁰⁰

Spirituality imaged by Len evokes Bond's radical innocence. For Bond 'transcendence is the story of radical innocence and it has no end'.¹⁰¹ Such a view is indeed optimistic and is about the springs of spiritual growth rather than attainment. Len's relentlessly-expressed autonomous spirituality proves to be something of a joke with his immediate friends. In Bond's words, he seems to 'have dropped from outer space': an enchanted presence indeed.¹⁰² Len repeatedly 'gets in the way' of the more malign behaviour of the group. Towards the end of the play, in Scene Twelve, he says apologetically, 'I get in the way, don't I?'

HARRY: Thought yer like t' say goodnight.

LEN: Yeh. Ta.

HARRY: They're all in bed.

LEN: I get in the way, don't I?

⁹⁷ Sarah Kane, *Blasted* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015 [1995]), pp.50-51.

⁹⁸ W. B. Yeats, lines five and six from 'The Second Coming', *Selected Poetry*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1964), p. 99.

⁹⁹ *Blasted*, directed by Ali Pidsley for Rift Productions at the Styx Theatre, Tottenham Hale, London, 3-11 March, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Tuillon, p.185.

¹⁰¹ Peter Billingham, *Edward Bond: A Critical Study* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), p. 127. Bond is quoted from his 'Introduction to the Chair Plays', p. xiii.

¹⁰² Tuillon, p. 72.

HARRY: Take no notice,
LEN: Sick a rows.
HARRY: They've 'ad their say. They'll keep quiet now.
LEN: I upset every –
HARRY: No different if yer go. They won't let yer drop.
LEN: Different for me.¹⁰³

Throughout the play, the dialogue has been pared to the minimum evoking a spiritually-repressed society. Len is apologizing for his unwelcome compassion and consideration for others. But by the end of the play he accepts and values the deep humanity of his 'difference' and quietly, wordlessly, in the rebuilding of the chair, consolidates it. Len's spiritual quietness is in direct contrast to the effervescent spirituality of Fry's protagonists. As an instigator of conflict such quietness functions as a core dramatic device: the animation of the spiritual as against the rigidly rational. The spiritual survives. In contemporaneous poet Philip Larkin's words 'What will survive of us is love'.¹⁰⁴ As Trussler points out, Len's goodness is not corrupted, despite 'the atmosphere of perpetual hostility' in which he lives.¹⁰⁵

Thanotic Spirituality

As the play progresses, a negative force supplants *collectively* whatever humanity this small microcosm of society may have had at one time. Bond sees the stoning of the baby as an image of the group's search for humanness.¹⁰⁶ The men may see imaged in the inchoate crying of the baby their own vulnerability and helplessness yet Bond insists 'they know what they are doing'.¹⁰⁷ There is a fundamental ambivalence in their behavioural attitudes which is shown to admit the thanotic. In Kristvan terms this is 'a freedom which integrates evil'.¹⁰⁸ They 'can do what they like' and 'might as well enjoy themselves', however death-oriented. The scene—Scene Six—is intricately structured to bring out the full horror of the act.

MIKE (*quietly*). Reckon it's all right?
COLIN (*quietly*). No one around.
PETER (*quietly*). They don't know it's us.
MIKE (*quietly*). She left it.

¹⁰³ *Saved*, Scene Twelve, p.115.

¹⁰⁴ Philip Larkin, *The Whitsun Weddings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 'An Arundel Tomb' was published in 1956 in the *London Magazine*, then later incorporated into the 1964 publication.

¹⁰⁵ Trussler, p. 12.

¹⁰⁶ Tuailon, p. 74.

¹⁰⁷ Tuailon, p. 77

¹⁰⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, p.160.

BARRY. It's done now.
PETER (*quietly*). Yer can do what you like.
BARRY. Might as well enjoy ourselves.
PETER (*quietly*). Yer don't get a chance like this everyday. ¹⁰⁹

The statements 'Reckon it's all right?', 'No one around' and 'They don't know it's us' suggest a fearful uncertainty about the act as if the group does not quite know what it is about to do. The alternating short scenes which follow show nervy laughter and obscure jokiness as if they are alienating themselves from full consciousness of the act: 'Liven up 'Ampstead heath! Three throws a quid! Make a packet.'

Living in an early sixties urban wasteland, characterised by Kynaston as deficient emotionally and familiarly, a deficiency reflected in 'the fairly brutal home environment of many infant school pupils', cynicalised their collective experience as they grew older and what was left of their spiritual lives was vacuumed away.¹¹⁰ In this situation Kristeva's notion of the abject, experienced collectively by these youths, supports an interpretation of their profound spiritual nihilism or 'blank perversion' [...] which 'develops on the basis of and within such a void'.¹¹¹ The remains of spirituality in *Saved* functions almost as a silent witness in contrast to the in-yer-face spirituality in *The Lady's Not For Burning*. The musicality of the latter play, though amplifying opportunities for the spiritual to emerge in text, is not entirely missing from *Bond* but is there in more subdued, economical form. Musicality of text had been encountered in the writing of *Servants*. The opportunities it gave for spirituality to come through, however fleeting, was observed not only in the dance between Virginia and Millie but also in the counterpoint of their verbalising various remembered moments of spiritual awareness.

There is further distancing by the repeated stage direction 'A bell rings' which not only ratchets up the tension but also implants a surreal almost metaphysical dimension to the unfolding scene. We know it is the park keeper's bell but does it also image and symbolize something far more obscure than a profound stirring of collective conscience? The 'curious buzzing' sound the men make as 'they go off up left' suggests a confused excited group totally unsure of what they've done and why they've done it. For two or three minutes they are in the grip of a collective, surreal animated malignity. A childlike fear is reflected in:

FRED. They'll shut the gates.
PETE (*going*). There's an 'ole in the railin's.

¹⁰⁹ *Saved*, Scene Six, p. 69.

¹¹⁰ Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, p. 578.

¹¹¹ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, [1987] 1989), p. 82.

They behave like children afraid of being caught by the park keeper. The stoning of the baby is therefore an image of a collective spirituality in autonomous mode but couched in a thanatic register at the most primitive and unconscious level.

Patterning

Patterning in the play creates moments for spirituality to emerge using repetitions of imagery and stage directions in a musicalized momentum to enable these moments. Intricate patterning affords a negative spirituality to inhabit the baby-stoning scene as described above. Tyson's repressive jibes in *The Lady's Not For Burning* prefigure the curt repressive urban language of Bond's *Saved* although the characters are illiterate working class youths rather than the middle class officials there portrayed. A similar political point is being made in both plays about repression of the positive and autonomously spiritual. Rather than a line of dialogue which keeps reframing the dramaturgical tone of the play, thus affording the sudden emergences of spirituality in *Saved*, it is a continually repeated stage direction, variations on 'A baby cries' which achieves a similar effect.

The stage direction functions as a musical phrase which escalates and propels the action. Embryonic spirituality in a positive Eros-oriented register emerges in *Saved* fitfully and not always in the dialogue except through Len. Later, Kane uses a similar technique in *Blasted*. The device of repetition achieves similar purposes in both plays. The endlessly crying baby images the inchoate autonomous spirituality which has to be repressed. Simon Trussler understands this as 'a recurring pattern of rejected love.'¹¹³ In its undeveloped manner, the crying of the baby is expressive of the 'process of transformation and growth' as noted by Ursula King but without the religious connotation.¹¹⁴

Patterning in *Saved* is most prominent in the counterpoint of responses to the baby's needs. The pattern admitting thanotic spirituality functions from scenes Four to Six but is at its most effective in mapping Len's awakened spirituality in Scene Four. 'Slowly a baby starts to cry', in the light of what is to follow, reads as a portentous note.¹¹⁵ Various permutations of this stage direction, at intervals throughout the scene,

¹¹² *Saved*, Scene Six, p.71.

¹¹³ Trussler, p.12.

¹¹⁴ Ursula King, 'Spirituality in a Secular Society: Recovering a Lost Dimension', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 7, 3 (1985), 135-39 (p. 135).

¹¹⁵ *Saved*, Scene Four, p. 36.

serve to intensify and increase alternating characters' indifference i.e. Pam, Fred and Harry, or in the case of Len and Mary, troubling emotions and conscience into fleeting positive concern. The baby's first cry is punctuated by Len's 'Can you see?' The double irony of this first question is to show how, from then onward, no one is able to see in any visionary or perceptive sense who they are or what they are as human beings. They remain blind to their human failings and blind to the needs of the most vulnerable. Moments later, 'the baby screams with rage', provoking Mary to shout 'Pam-laa!' Pam turns up the volume of the television, suppressing the baby's screams. Len and Mary, almost politely, ignore Pam and the baby, concentrating on the meal. Then 'The baby chokes'. Pam's remark 'Too lazy to get up and fetch it' is accusatory of Len and Mary. When 'The baby whimpers pitifully', apparently responding to the needs of the baby, 'Pam picks up her things and goes out'.¹¹⁶ This provokes Mary's sardonic 'About time.' There is a kind of dance of indifference and spiritual concern throughout the scene, one provoking the other into dramatic life, relentlessly dramatizing societal repression of radical innocence.

Bond is carefully manipulating the sympathies of the audience in the cleverly-spaced spare rhythmic dialogue, pluralising the text's meaning. Len gets more food. 'Suddenly the baby cries much louder'. Pam returns, dressed to go out. Mary, conscience stricken, observes 'It's still cryin'. This results in Pam's callous, slightly comical, 'I thought the cat was stuck up the chimney'. Her indifference leads to an altercation with Len. Pam turns on Len: 'When yer leavin' us. I'm sick an' tired of arstin'. This, in contrast, provokes Len's 'I ain't leavin that kid'. Intermittently, after each baby cry, deeper and deeper responses are evoked showing the care of Len's agitated autonomous spirituality. The baby cries again, provoking another profound concern: 'I ain't leavin that kid'.¹¹⁷ After another cry, Len comes out with an almost persuasive: 'Kids need proper homes'. The baby whimpers. Fred, the father of the baby, enters to take Pam out for the evening. Mary (in an instance of ironic detached humour) rationalizes: 'We're just watchin' telly'. Pam asks if she can put the kid in Mary's room, indicating further obliteration of responsibility. Pam and Fred go out. Stage direction: 'The baby's crying gets louder.' After a pause, Len says 'I wish t' God I could take the kid out a this'.... 'Wish t' God I 'ad some place.' The baby continues to cry. 'I listen out for the kid. They ain't bothered.' The patterning of baby crying and rhythmic contrasting dialogue releases Len's awakened concern—a feature of his own suppressed spirituality, 'keeping his inner-self alive, that psychological space we call a soul' in Kristevan terms¹¹⁸—has a

¹¹⁶ *Saved*, Scene Four, p. 37.

¹¹⁷ *Saved*, Scene Four, p. 39.

¹¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, p.8.

vestige of the pained, wracked conscience of religious spirituality as noted by Kees Waaijman and is seen as not being entirely defeated by Pam's crass indifference.¹¹⁹

What happens in Scene Five onwards shows Len's repeated attempts at saving the baby from a fate even he cannot imagine. An autonomous spirituality of care surfaces intermittently in Len through the interstices of the musicalized patterning but, because he appears to be one of the them, no better than he should be, apparently, with their sex and booze mentality, he is tolerated jokily by the group. Len's submerged spirituality—his real concern for others, sensing wrong but afraid to intervene—shows how spirituality may surface in a playtext in a different register in the seventeen years between 1948 and 1965. The 'spiritual turn' of Heelas and Woodhead is less obviously spiritual. In *Saved*, the gently erotic flickering spirituality of Len and the thanotic, skewed, collective spirituality of the group is given equal weight.

These characters are part of the unchurched majority identified by Davie. There are only two references to church in the play and these are fleeting or sparse. 'Church' is a distant concept, a vestige of society's Christian mythology held in some respect by an older generation but not by the young. 'Christ' is used repeatedly as a swearword: 'Chriss!'—eight times in Scenes Five and Six. That it is not used more by the characters may reflect the Lord Chamberlain's control rather than any dramaturgical decision. According to Steve Nicholson, the Lord Chamberlain believed it was his duty to excise the words 'Christ' or 'Jesus; used as expletives in a text. 'They may be used in *common parlance*', he argued, but 'they still do give offence to a great number of people.'¹²⁰ Mary, still with some remnant of 'old school' values, may say, referring to pre-marital relations, 'We didn't carry on like that when we was younger [...] not til yer was in church'.¹²¹ But it is clear that she only half means it. Bond does not judge his characters and there is no dialectic against religion in this play. We see the playing out of the basically human, with a different collective thanotic spirituality emerging in the stoning of the baby, the baby the vulnerable symbol of the innocent, embryonic protesting spirituality which has to be repressed. Bond suggests, perversely, that the real salvation is that the baby, through being stoned to death, is saved from the fate of having to grow up in such a barbaric society.

As *The Lady's Not for Burning* plays out in its first act an evolving demonstration, through rhythmic and metrical language, of spirituality-against-indifference, so does, in a

¹¹⁹ Kees Waaijman, p. 215. Kees Waaijman's concept of the holy fool who 'keeps alive the human conscience' could usefully be applied to the character of Len.

¹²⁰ Steve Nicholson, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets* (London, The British Library, 2004), p.20

¹²¹ *Saved*, Scene Nine, p. 89.

parallel but more fraught and subdued way, spirituality in *Saved*. In both plays spirituality finally surfaces however scarred in one form or another, at least in one character, which may account for Bond's hyperbolic '*Saved* is almost irresponsibly optimistic'¹²² and Fry's claim that 'poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement.'¹²³

Stratification and Quietness

Critics such as David L. Hirst have averred that there is no subtext in *Saved*, and consequently no layers of meaning to be unravelled but, taking into consideration the submersion of spirituality in the text, there is, if not a subtext, recognizable stratified layers of meaning.¹²⁴ In *Saved* the layers are the layers of buried autonomous spirituality in Mary and Len until Len is provoked by circumstance to reveal his true caring nature, as explained above.

Similarly, the thanotic spirituality which controls the collective behavior of the youths is submerged until challenged by the catalysing pre-verbal crying of the vulnerable infant. The musical rhythms and careful patterning of the text in Scene Six depicting the stoning enforce the relentless emergence of the thanotic, one of Kristeva's drives which challenges the symbolic, contrasting with the earlier more humorous depiction of the social group in Acts One to Five.

In the latter stages of the play an important aspect of this patterning is quietness, or omission of conversation, which functions as a conduit of pained autonomous spirituality in what Len does not say and in the actions which he takes. Quietness also evokes the stultification of energy and profound spiritual stasis into nihilism of the group. The final scene plays out in almost complete silence except for a couple of loud bangs off-stage and a single utterance from Len: 'Fetch me 'ammer'. Pam is reading the Radio Times and Mary is removing dinner plates from the table and cleaning up. Harry fills in his football coupons. Len enters with the broken chair and, having asked for his hammer, begins to adjust the chair. Pam goes out (seemingly to get the hammer) but returns (without the hammer) and sits on the couch. Unhelped and completely ignored by the others, Len, with his back to the audience, 'pulls the loose rear leg into the socket'.¹²⁵ In such inchoate quietness, Len's unbroken, unobtrusive, determined spirituality of action speaks volumes about his feelings and outlook and survives group indifference and ignorance. 'Spirituality is intensely practical' says Melanie Rogers. It 'describes the

¹²² *Saved*, Author's Note, p.5.

¹²³ Christopher Fry, *The Early Days*, p.12.

¹²⁴ David L. Hirst, *Edward Bond* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985). p.49.

¹²⁵ *Saved*, Scene Thirteen, p.123.

qualities that give people hope, meaning and purpose.¹²⁶ Len's quiet determination lends an aura of re-enchantment to a bleak societal setting, offering a hopeful poignancy to the play's ending. Judging by Rogers's comments, Len is the healthiest character in the play.

Autonomous spirituality in *Saved* may be 'submerged' or constricted in a way that it is not in Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning* but that is not to say it is less real or as affecting. Bonds terse style admits a different dramatic emergence. From a Kristevan point of view, spirituality in Bond's playtext might be seen as a spirituality of the gaps. From the Kristevan void, or from the nothingness Bond sees underpinning human experience, emerges that saving drive or energy which enables 'the triumph of the human spirit' which Bond ultimately believes in.¹²⁷

Conclusion

This chapter has taken an empirical and holistic approach, drawing on Kristeva's theory of the way the semiotic may complicate the symbolic, to find and evaluate spirituality in the text of Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning* and find thematic and stylistic links with Edward Bond's *Saved*. Both plays respond to the post-war crisis of spirituality in Britain in their different ways, animating its movement away from orthodox belief and church attendance, as mapped by sociologists Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, towards something more personal and un-institutionalised.

In these plays we see a spirituality which is not narrowly equated with religious belief or expression or exclusively with the serene or benign but operates within a wide spectrum of human experience. In Fry, such spirituality challenges a prevailing moribund and baffled 'Christian' ethos. In Bond, it emerges, with dramaturgical economy, through a kind of moral nothingness. This is the kind of spirituality that makes 'a difference in terms of how people act', according to scientist David Sloan Wilson, focusing on the Eros-oriented aspect while agreeing with Tom Stoppard in his defence of transcendence as an ineradicable human propensity.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Melanie Rogers, Senior Lecturer and Advanced Nurse Practitioner at the University of Huddersfield. 'Spirituality plays huge part in patients' recovery from illness', November 10, 2014, University of Huddersfield, <<http://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-11-spirituality-huge-patients-recovery-illness.html>> [accessed 21.1.2019].

¹²⁷ Malcolm Hay and Phillip Roberts, p.56.

¹²⁸ Tom Stoppard, David Sloan Wilson, Stuart Jeffries, 'The Hard Problem: Tom Stoppard on the limits of what science can explain', *The Guardian*, 22 May, 2015, www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/22/the-hard-problem-tom-stoppard-on-the-limits-of-what-science-can-explain [accessed 12 January, 2021]

Both Fry and Bond furnish linguistic and non-linguistic examples (the non-linguistic element, still scripted, remains in the domain of the text) of their different kinds of spirituality, the presence of which lends fleeting moments of enchantment, both good and bad, in their scripts. Fry is not perceived as a 'schizophrenic' writer dealing with undifferentiated and awkwardly-introduced pagan and religious themes but as a playwright whose careful balancing of autonomous, hybrid and shades of Christian-religious spirituality in a play's text through imagery and linguistic effervescence, creates an organic richness and musicalisation of dramatic language which is unique in 1950s theatre. Likewise, Bond's dramatic language, though freighted with less obvious autonomous and Eros-oriented register than Fry and introducing a strikingly dramatic thanotic spirituality into sixties theatre which prefigures Peter Shaffer's more flamboyant use of the death-oriented spiritual in *Equus*, nevertheless continues a trend which can be tracked from Eliot to Fry to the fitful emergence or gradual occlusion of spirituality within the playscripts of the following decades. For Fry and Bond, vibrant areas in both plays evoke two sides of British society in the fifties and sixties; in Fry, a new short-lived post-war sense of spiritual freedom and in Bond, the flipside of a murderous ennui and an erosion of faith. Yet in their dramatic acknowledgement of the evolving spiritual landscape of their times is a tacit avowal of the deeper components of humanity.

With these observations in mind, I trace and evaluate spirituality as it emerges with particular nuance in Peter Shaffer's *Equus* and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*.

Chapter Five

Peter Shaffer and Caryl Churchill: Ways of Seeing in the Dark

All plenitude (of language) turns out to be inscribed upon a 'void' which simply remains when the overabundance of meaning, desire, violence, and anguish is drained by means of language.¹

Julia Kristeva

I need—more desperately than my children need me—a way of seeing in the dark.²

Peter Shaffer

In contrast with the fulsome evocation of spirituality-in-text using the medium of versification in Fry's post-war plays and the subtle shading of spirituality afforded by Bond's economy of dramatic language in the sixties, Peter Shaffer and Caryl Churchill, in the seventies and eighties, bring an oblique but no less potent representation of the spiritual (or lack of it) in their plays *Equus* and *Top Girls*.

Shaffer had a Methodist upbringing and Churchill a leaning towards Buddhism. Their plays evoke spiritualities not too-far removed from these religious backgrounds. In *Equus* (1973) the protagonist Alan Strang, with his Christian Mother and atheist father, exhibits a subversive arcane behaviour in his horse-blinding activities, a twisted sense of the mysterious which his psychiatrist, Martin Dysart, is reluctant to cure. In *Top Girls* (1982), worldly success is shown as covering degrees of personal and ontological suffering as well as a suppressed autonomous spirituality not all to be blamed on the patriarchal attitudes of the go-getting eighties as Marlene, the protagonist, herself, learns. In both plays the void which Kristeva sensed as a result of the reductive power of language, is evident in many scenes. Here, language negates what original spiritual impulses may exist yet, paradoxically, in specific areas of text, bears witness to them.

Although the two plays are clearly dissimilar in content there are, as with Fry and Bond, commonalities in the structuring of the vibrant areas in text, Churchill and Shaffer adding two new vibrant areas in more extended sequences than were found in the previous works. These new areas are not only spiritually potent but dramatically thrilling.

¹ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p.34.

² Peter Shaffer, *Equus* (Harlow: Longman, [1973]1993), p.109.

Both plays in their own ways are strikingly evocative of the zeitgeists of their time—the me-centred ontologies of the seventies for *Equus* and the prevalent Thatcherite justification of selfishness in the eighties for *Top Girls*—and both, I will argue, illustrate dramatically false but alluring spiritualities for their protagonists. In this, both plays are vivid examples of text-locked spiritualities operating either in thanotic registers or repressive mode.

***Equus*: ‘Suddenly I heard this noise. Coming up behind me.’³**

Equus was first performed on the London stage at the National Theatre in 1973, with Alec McCowen as Martin Dysart and Colin Firth as Alan Strang, directed by John Dexter. The play made an immediate impression, with enthusiastic reviews and was a box office hit. When it transferred to Broadway in October, 1974, praise from critics was still forthcoming and the production ran for over four years. Michael Jayston took over from McCowen and David Dixon from Firth when it transferred to the Albery Theatre, London, in 1977. I remember seeing the production on tour at the Ashcroft Theatre, Croydon: in a packed theatre the atmosphere was electric with anticipation. The play had gripped its audience even before the lights went down.

For Michael Billington, in the *Guardian*, the original London production was ‘sensationally good’ but Irving Wardle tempered his praise with a caveat that Shaffer’s characters behaved like ‘schematic automatons’.⁴ *Daily Express* critic Ian Curteis found the play ‘pretentious philosophical claptrap’, an opinion later echoed by Susannah Clapp in the *Guardian* (‘daft and dazzling’; 2007) and Nick Curtis in the *Evening Standard* (‘backward-looking claptrap’ 2019).⁵ When the play transferred to Broadway, Clive Barnes in the *New York Times* found that ‘the play was richly rewarding on many levels’ and Walter Kerr, in another review for the same paper, recognized Shaffer’s ‘sustained and multi-faceted sensibility’.⁶ A general focus in all newspaper reviews then and since has been that Shaffer had meshed sex and religion in *Equus* to beguiling theatrical effect. Similar views were expressed in academic articles of the time such as James R.

³ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 10, p.38.

⁴ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 1973; Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 1973, [Both accessed 9.6.2020]

⁵ Ian Curteis, *Daily Express* 1973; Susannah Clapp, *Guardian*, 2007; and Nick Curtis, *Evening Standard*, 2019. [All accessed 9.6.2020]

⁶ Clives Barnes, ‘Equus a New Success on Broadway’, *New York Times*, 25.10.1974 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1974/10/25/archives/equusa-new-success-on-broadway.html>> [accessed 11.6.2020]; Walter Kerr, ‘Equus Takes Risks and Emerges Victorious’, 3.11.1974 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1974/11/03/archives/equus-takes-risks-and-emerges-victorious-stage-view.html>> [accessed 11.6.2020]

Stacy's view that, in *Equus*, Shaffer was engaged in 'a search for worship'.⁷ C. J. Gianakaris perceived, in *Equus*, 'man's search for a dependable god who can lend order to the universe'.⁸ But only in reactions to much later productions such as Thea Sharrock's in 2007 and Ned Bennett's in 2019 was a keener focus given to the spiritual aspects of the play both in theatre criticism and academic scholarship. Michael Billington in the *Guardian* recognised a protagonist who was 'sexually and spiritually excited by tactile horseflesh' and Tom Frances in *The Spy in the Stalls* was startled by 'the nuclear level of theatrical and spiritual energy that is transferred to the audience'.⁹ Between 2007 and 2019 Graham Wolfe had examined *Equus* through a Lacanian lens without finding a spiritual element at all.¹⁰ In 2019 anonymous theatre critics for *Partially Obstructed View* and *What's On Stage* were writing about 'the play's strange mysticism' and 'Alan's world of twisted spirituality, passion and sexuality'.¹¹ It is in relation to these varied discussions and differing points of view that I contextualise my findings.

On December 15, 1974, a lone, almost apologetic, voice made itself known in the *New York Times*: that of psychoanalyst Sandford Gifford, M.D. Dr Gifford questioned the accuracy of the psychoanalytical process depicted in *Equus*. In acknowledging the powerful theatricality of the work he called into question the increasingly 'portentous imagery', the way multiplying theatrical devices 'trick' the audience, and the 'principal message' that 'if we give up our symptoms, we lose our imaginative powers and must accept a bleak, plastic 'normality', without colour or passion'.¹² Gifford's response was personal as well as self-statedly 'professional', backed up with a few references to the psychology of R. D. Laing, Sigmund Freud, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Andre Gide. The psychoanalyst revealed no sense that Shaffer may have been exploring dramatically, in both protagonists, personal spiritualities gone awry. To an extent Gifford's critique is a product of the reductive psychology of its time. The play is 'mythical', 'romantic', has a 'spurious air of importance', yet 'some illusion of truth must be there as the play

⁷ James R. Stacy, 'The Sun and the Horse: Peter Shaffer's Search for Worship', *Educational Theatre Journal*, John Hopkins University Press, vol 8, no.3. October 1976, pp 325-337.

⁸ C. J. Gianakaris, *Peter Shaffer: A Casebook*, (New York; Garland Publishing, Inc, 1991), p.90.

⁹ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 2018 and Tom Frances, *Spy in the Stalls*, 2019 [both accessed 9.6.2020]

¹⁰ Graham Wolfe, 'Enjoying *Equus*: *Jouissance* in Shaffer's Play', *PsyArt, An Online Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*, October 24, 2010, <<https://psyartjournal.com/article/show/wolfe-enjoying-equus-jouissance-in-shaffers-pl>> [accessed 10.4.20], p.9.

¹¹ *Partially Obstructed View*, 2019 and *What's On Stage* 2019 [both accessed 9.6.2020].

¹² Sandford Gifford, M.D., 'Psychoanalyst Says Nay to 'Equus'', *New York Times*, December 15, 1974 <<https://nyti.ms/1MOW6tJ>> [accessed 30.3.2020]

continues to draw large audiences in London and New York and has evoked many enthusiastic reviews'.¹³ Gifford's 'illusion of truth' phrase demands closer scrutiny. Is this a critique of the ephemeral nature of theatre itself? If the play *does* evoke spiritualities gone awry, even to the point of malignity or thanoticism, as I will argue it does, where in the text can we find the evidence? And how does the evidence get there? Is Shaffer's psychology as spurious and pretentious as Gifford and later online theatre critics such as Peter Brown, *London Theatre Co.Uk* (2007) , and Benedict Nightingale, *The Times* (2007) , make out? ¹⁴

The seventies was a decade of transition and transformation in British theatre with all manner of searchings undertaken for different ways of presenting performance. The era saw the rise of Margaret Thatcher to political power, first as leader of the Conservative party in 1975, as the first woman Prime Minister from 1979. This was a time of increasing social unrest: power cuts, strikes, repression of union activities and violent IRA protest. Notwithstanding the uncertainty, as if the country was trying to forge a new identity, a culture of individualism seemed to be endorsed by Thatcher's widely-publicised comment that there was 'no such thing as society'.¹⁵ Playwright David Edgar observed 'a subtle privatisation of concern as the 'we' decade turned into the 'me' decade' and, at the beginning of this precarious egalitarian setting, Shaffer's highly individual play took shape.¹⁶ With no obvious political message or slant, *Equus* must have seemed a refreshing departure with its focus on the transcendent needs of the individual psyche and its need for representation in a secularised era.

Gifford's response may have seemed less an outpouring of personal pique at a play which he believed denigrated his profession, if he had been able to draw on the theories of Julia Kristeva or, at least, on the collective unconscious theory of Carl Jung. But as a seventies Freudian, he was still unlikely to do that. Jung was still suspect with his sympathetic view of the religious impulse and Kristeva was yet to write and publish.

That something is awry generally is flagged up in the play's first scene: seventeen year old Alan Strang stands fondling the head of the horse Nugget which, 'in turn,

¹³ Sandford Gifford, MD., p.2 of digitised edition.

¹⁴ Peter Brown, *Equus* review, *London Theatre.co.uk*, 1.3.2007 <<https://www.londontheatre.co.uk/reviews/equus>> [accessed 10.6.2020]; Benedict Nightingale, *Equus* review, *The Times*, 28.2.2020 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/equus-g8jb779wwrw>> [accessed 10.6.2020].

¹⁵ Douglas Keay interviews Margaret Thatcher, *Woman's Own*, 23.9.1987, <<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>> [accessed 10.6.2020]

¹⁶ David Edgar, 'Public Theatre in a Private Age', in *The Second Time as Farce: Reflections on the Drama of Mean Times* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1988), p.165.

nuzzles his neck'.¹⁷ In the original production, the horses were played by male actors with horses' heads as masks which were worn throughout. The actors wore foot gear resembling hooves. In the recent 2019 production these requirements were simplified.

Because the play is based on reportage as relayed by a friend of the playwright, the audience would already have some idea of the well-publicised (horrific) content, not to mention the equally well-publicised nude scenes, and the opening tableau is set to intrigue.¹⁸ Martin Dysart expresses desperate feelings of disorientation in the mesmerising presence of both horse and rider: 'You see, I'm lost'.¹⁹ The rest of the play unravels in a series of events, occasionally in flashback, as seen from Dysart's troubled perspective. Vibrant areas of spirituality emerge in the text in small increments—in imagery, strategically-placed statement, stage direction—with two vibrant areas not encountered in the previous works: runic chant (foreshadowed in Eliot's *The Family Reunion*) and heightened sequence. These last two newly discovered areas are also to be found in Churchill's *Top Girls*. The incremental use of vibrant areas in these two plays can be seen as a dramatist's response to the dominant cynical materialism of the 70s and 80s as espoused by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Runic chant in *Equus*, with its use of inane advertising jingles, suggests how genuine spirituality can be colonised and bastardised by contemporary culture and, when runic chant is used by Churchill in *Top Girls*, how prayerful learning-by-rote can be rendered meaningless by mechanical repetition over the years. Heightened sequences in both plays evoke societal trends of the period: in *Equus*, the fashionable therapy-speak of R. D. Laing in a time of chronic social uncertainty and, in *Top Girls*, the prevalent café culture of the big cities where cosmopolitan crowds gathered impromptu to seek some common valorisation of their disparate and troubled lives.

The vibrant areas found and interrogated in *Equus* are: imagery, stage direction, runic chant and heightened sequence.

In Kristevan terms, Shaffer is demonstrating 'the ability of language to reach even the most inaccessible traces of instinct and the most troubling representations of desire.'²⁰ Vibrant areas in *Equus* bear witness to the ability of language to evoke facets of the multi-faceted spiritual. In *Equus*, as in *Top Girls*, vibrant areas are used as tools of analysing in-text spiritual emergence.

¹⁷ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 1, p.17.

¹⁸ As related by the author in the introduction to *Equus*, p xxi.

¹⁹ *Equus*, *ibid.*, p.17.

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love*, p.56.

Vibrant Areas: Imagery

In *Equus*, the horse, not merely an image, also functions as a central symbol of the play, a conduit of the spiritual. Multiple horse images—and other animal images—found on the walls of the Lascaux caves in France are generally believed to have carried a primitive spiritual or ritualistic component for these prehistoric artists.²¹ Shaffer accesses a known primordial image in his play to carry its meaning. For Carl Jung horse myths accommodate projections of the human. Developmental psychologist James Fowler emphasises the fertility of image in spiritual development, uniting ‘information and feeling; [holding] together orientation and affectional significance’.²² Functioning as a symbol, the horse evokes Alan Strang’s undifferentiated embryonic spirituality which has supplanted the heavy Christian influence of his mother. For Alan, the horse image presents as a precarious symbolic plateau between the religious stance of his mother, Dora, and the atheistic beliefs of his father, Frank.

The animal image, for Kristeva, suggests a placement in abjection which is ‘a precondition of narcissism’.²³ Moreover, ‘abjection accompanies all religious structurings’—accounting for Alan’s psychic predicament where his spirituality is compromised by a confused Christian/atheist upbringing which at once privileges and marginalises worship.²⁴ In such circumstances, ‘archaic resonances’ would inform the religiosity which would be created anew as ‘a threatening otherness’.²⁵ Alan’s worship of *Equus* can be seen as a revolt of the unconscious into creating a personal, if arcane and immature, spiritual stance.

Eyes is a recurrent image in *Equus*. The image does not simply refer to the eyes of the six horses which are blinded but also to Alan’s de-stabling stare—‘the strangest stare I ever met’ in Dysart’s words; Dysart’s inability to see i.e. to make sense of what is happening and the lack of visionary understanding by the other characters.²⁶ For Dysart, the image evokes not only the spiritual vision he desperately needs to facilitate ‘a way of

²¹ Emma Groenveld, ‘Lascaux Cave’ <https://www.ancient.eu/Lascaux_Cave/> [accessed 20.4.20]

²² James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1981), p. 26.

²³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans. by Leon. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.13.

²⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.17.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 6, p.26.

seeing in the dark' but also the psychological blindness he feels in relation to Alan's enviable predicament.²⁷

Dora, Alan's mother, suspects some kind of conflation of animal and Christian imagery in Alan's mind when she informs Dysart of the horse picture which took the place of the Christ-in-chains picture at the foot of Alan's bed:

DORA: Well it's most extraordinary. It comes out all eyes.

DYSART: Staring straight at you?²⁸

The eyes image is set up early in the play and is repeatedly used. As a conveyor of spirituality the image is dramatically potent, not portentous, when used within a strategically-placed statement:

DYSART: And there he spoke to you, didn't he? He looked at you with gentle eyes and spake unto you?²⁹

Dysart uses a Biblical phrase—'spake unto you'—reminiscent of the language of the King James Bible which Shaffer would know from his Methodist upbringing. The King James version uses antiquated seventeenth century linguistic structures: 'Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren'.³⁰ These ancient linguistics, which Alan himself chooses to use in reference to the horses, add to a sense of otherness of Alan's psychology and suggest that, spiritually, he is stuck in an insufficiently-imagined, immature psychic world: 'Flankus begat Spankus. And Spankus begat Spunkus the Great, who lived three score years!'³¹ Dysart uses Alan's adopted language in a slightly mocking way, with its overtones of 'gentle Jesus meek and mild', but the mocking tone increases its dramatic effectiveness. Earlier in scene 16, the stage directions indicate the numinous power the animals have over Alan: 'sunk in this glowing world of horses. Lost in wonder, he starts almost involuntarily to kneel on the floor in reverence.'³²

Darkness itself is another potent image in the play redolent of spiritual presence. Eyes stare at Alan through the dark, Dysart dreams in the dark of carving up children, Frank Strang, Alan's father, visits a movie theatre to watch pornographic films in the dark. The dark is the site of malign presences. '*What dark is this?*' is the last question

²⁷ *Equus*, Act Two, Scene 35, p.109.

²⁸ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 11, p.45.

²⁹ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 19, p. 67.

³⁰ *King James Bible*, Matthew, Chapter 1, verse 2.

³¹ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 14, p.51.

³² *Equus*, Act One, Scene 16, p.56.

Dysart asks.³³ Whilst I agree with Graham Wolfe that this question 'directly converts darkness to a palpable positively given *thing*, intolerable in its proximity',³⁴ such a view does not allow for dark as a fertile birth-giver, a sense which permeates the whole play and provokes the skeptic Dysart to want 'to pay it so much homage'.³⁵ If both protagonists are in search of a sustaining spirituality, it is a spirituality which emerges out of darkness: literally in Alan's case, and as an envious psychic need in Dysart's case.

In the hypnosis game *Blink*, darkness emerges as a revealer of spiritual secrets as in the midnight rides Alan takes on Nugget/Equus:

DYSART: And then you rode in secret?

ALAN: Yes.

and, later the confession:

DYSART: Then you'd slip out of the house?

ALAN: Midnight! On the stroke!³⁶

The slipping out of the house in secret, at midnight, is reminiscent in its spiritual fervour, of a passage in St John of the Cross's poem *The Dark Night*: 'With nobody in sight/ I went abroad when all my house was hushed.'³⁷ Yet the tone, unlike the sense of grace in St John's poem, is weird and portentous, a prelude to his ecstatic pagan nude communion astride Nugget/Equus where 'he twists like a flame'.³⁸ With Shaffer's Christian background it is more than likely that the playwright was fully aware of the theological connotations of the imagery of darkness and flame, as used in the poems of St John of the Cross.

The key is another potent spiritual image linking two halves of the play. The multi-layered image functions as the key to the stable which Alan visits at midnight, Dysart's key to understanding Alan's motivation, and the key to revealing the larger mystery of Alan's spirituality. As Dysart says, 'The key is in your hands. Go and open it.'³⁹

³³ *Equus*, Act Two, Scene 35, p. 109.

³⁴ Graham Wolfe, 'Enjoying *Equus*: *Jouissance* in Shaffer's Play', *PsyArt, An Online Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*, October 24, 2010, <<https://psyartjournal.com/article/show/wolfe-enjoying-equus-jouissance-in-shaffers-pl>> [accessed 10.4.20], p.9.

³⁵ *Equus*, Act Two, Scene, 35, p.109.

³⁶ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 19, p. 68.

³⁷ *St John of the Cross: The Poems*, trans. by Roy Campbell (London: The Harvill Press, [1951] 2000), p.25.

³⁸ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 21, p. 74.

³⁹ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 19, p. 68.

Not least among images is the meta-theatrical scenographic device of the performance space which can be construed as a ritualistic temenos in *Equus*.

⁴⁰According to Shaffer's description, the setting is 'a square of wood set on a circle of wood. The resembles a railed boxing ring'.⁴¹ The action takes place there and the actors, seated on benches around this centre piece, get up, when on cue, to perform their scene. This circumscribed space is evocative of the sacred spaces in caves, in prehistoric times, which, according to Steven Mithen, became a 'demarcated space for performance'.⁴² Shaffer's designated performance space provides a setting for evocation of the pre-Christian spirituality of early man. In such dark spaces early humans gathered to slaughter the animals they had caught, horses figuring prominently, and, according to Mithen, they would sing. It's uncanny that Shaffer would have used such a ritualistic setting so aptly as a setting for the dramatic action but he shows awareness of this concept in Dysart's agonized: 'It's [Equus] calling me out of the Black Cave of the Psyche'.⁴³ The theatre space design contributes greatly to a focus for the dramatic evocation of a disturbed adolescent's embryonic but ecstatic hybrid spirituality.

Stage-Direction

The choral humming by the horses which haunts Alan and is heard onstage when he attempts to engage with them evokes the strange hinterland of Alan's wayward adolescent spirituality. Corrupted by television jingles, adverts and pictorial representations of Christ conflated with a particular white horse which he has worshipped at the foot of his bed since he was twelve, the humming arises from a deep pre-linguistic psychic world which seems to 'come up behind' him.⁴⁴

For Chorus, read *chora*, Kristeva's word for pre-linguistic drives arising from the unconscious. Among those drives is the spiritual. The pre-linguistic babble is, according to neuroscientist Diana Deutsch, an early precursor of song which may also explain Alan's wishing to sing at climactic moments.⁴⁵ The Chorus makes the Equus Noise which 'heralds the presence of Equus the God'.⁴⁶ The noise is as much as rendering in dramatic language of Alan's interior noise, as a rendering of the spiritual hinterland

⁴⁰ According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, page 1462, a temenos is 'a sacred enclosure or precinct adjacent to a temple'.

⁴¹ *Equus*, The Setting, p. 13.

⁴² Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neandertals* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, [2005] 2006), p.175.

⁴³ *Equus*, Act Two, Scene 22, p.75.

⁴⁴ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 10, p.38.

⁴⁵ Diana Deutsch, 'Speaking in Tones', *Scientific American Mind*, vol 21, no 3, (July/August 2010), p. 36.

⁴⁶ *Equus*, Act One, p.16.

symbolised by the horses. Alan is shown as spiritually arrested, dangerously close to a pre-linguistic stage although in ordinary conscious conversation he is fluent enough. His first dramatic utterance of 'Ek! Ek!' recalls the pre-linguistic babble of the child until he manages to form the word *Equus*.⁴⁷ In the broken-ness of this utterance is indicated a spiritual awe and reverence. Dysart, as a therapist, has managed to enable Alan to authenticate his need to believe which Kristeva states is 'the analyst's job'.⁴⁸

'A louder, metallic sound, on tape' also images the strange spiritual hinterland as Alan is taken deep into hypnosis. This sound takes over from Dysart's tapping his pen on a wooden rail marking the rhythm of Alan's opening and shutting of eyes in the game of *Blink*. Subtly theatrical, the sound simultaneously also evokes Dysart's own arid, possibly gay spirituality, in which he questions his role as psychiatrist: 'The Normal is the indispensable, murderous God of Health, and I am its Priest'.⁴⁹ Paradoxically, and regardless of Dysart's psychological games and methods, a spiritual presence is evoked in this brief stage-directed vibrant area drawing the audience away from the normal to the penumbra of Alan's troubled hybrid spirituality.

Runic chant

Alan voices his particular spiritual awareness, an awareness of something he does not fully understand, in the coded language of chant, using crass imagery from television jingles of the sixties to convey his constricted sense of awe and wonder:

ALAN: Double your pleasure.

Double your fun

With Doublemint, Doublemint

Doublemint gum.⁵⁰

These are his first obscure words to Dysart suggesting not only a reluctance to directly communicate with the psychiatrist but also an arrogant fearful evasion of his questioning.

For Kristeva such linguistic evasion is indicative of a shoring up of a fundamentalist, adolescent faith, which however obscure, protects the inner psyche from inundation by threatening forces. However conflated Alan's spirituality may be—a conflation of the Christian and the pagan, the religious and the autonomous—'he only looks for it because he is sure it must exist'.⁵¹ According to Kristeva what the adolescent

⁴⁷ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 8, p.35.

⁴⁸ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p.20.

⁴⁹ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 19, p.65.

⁵⁰ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 3, p.22.

⁵¹ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p. 14.

is looking for is as much an erotic object as a quest for an Absolute. This makes sense when applied to Alan's fixation on the Equus God.

The chanting is runic because it conveys an ambivalence in the search for worship. For Kristeva, Alan's spirituality, arising from conflicting adolescent desires of love and sadomasochism, is balancing on a precarious knife-edge, particularly with regard to the horse. Alan 'believes that the Great Other exists'. i.e. the Equus God, but 'the least disappointment in this syndrome of ideality hurls him into paradise's ruins, in the form of punitive behaviour'.⁵² Taking into account Kristeva's depiction of the adolescent 'malady of ideality', Shaffer's presentation of Alan's spiritual predicament is dead right.⁵³

By the end of Act One the jingles have given way to a more religiously slanted language, channelling the fierce Christian beliefs of his mother who would narrate lurid Bible passages to him as bedtime stories:

ALAN: And Equus the Mighty rose against All!

His enemies scatter, his enemies fall.⁵⁴

That this expression is at a fixated stage of hybrid spirituality, in a negative Thanatos-oriented register, is corroborated by the image of an animal, a horse, which suggests the undeveloped pagan awareness mashed up with half-digested Christian narratives but, for Alan, it is enough. Dysart is at the listening stage of his talking cure and, envying his patient's spiritual passion, will hesitate (in Act Two) to lead him to the third stage of the cure where, referencing Kristeva, he will 'indicate the negative value, the oedipal or orestean revolt, of such forms of behaviour'.⁵⁵

The vibrant area of runic chant as a means of accessing the spiritual is foreshadowed earlier in the choruses of Eliot's *The Family Reunion* and discovered later in Joan's half-remembered chanting in Churchill's *Top Girls*.

Heightened Sequence

Two heightened sequences admitting spirituality through their vibrant areas can be found in *Equus*, one at the climax of Act One and the other towards the climax of Act Two. These are more extensively depicted areas of spirituality than had been found in the previous works and present as sustained vibrant areas. Each heightened sequence is

⁵² Ibid., p.15/16.

⁵³ Ibid., p.16.

⁵⁴ *Equus*, Act One, Scene, 21, p.73.

⁵⁵ Julia Kristeva, p.20.

carefully placed toward the end of each act, benefitting from the relentless build-up of tension as the story of Dysart's gradual understanding of Alan's predicament is dramatically unravelled.

Dysart has tried word games to disarm and penetrate Alan's psychic defences but they have not been entirely successful. Starting with another word game *Blink*, which leads smoothly into his use of hypnotism, Dysart encourages the boy to relive his experience so as to find a way of understanding his obsession with horses and his consequent crime, a way of seeing into the darkness of his mind. The hypnosis sequence—particularly in Scene 21 ending with the word 'AMEN!'—plays out as a heightened, highly theatrical, sequence showing an embryonic form of complex hybrid spirituality in action in a Thanatos-oriented register, in both Alan and Dysart, couched in homo-erotic imagery. The use of erotic imagery has a long tradition in mystical poetry, particularly in the poetry of St John of the Cross:

With his serenest hand
My neck he wounded, and
Suspended every sense with its caresses.⁵⁶

The slow build-up starts in Scene 19, at an afternoon meeting of patient and psychiatrist. Having introduced the new game *Blink* at which Alan agrees to participate—both had agreed in Scene 9 to answer, truthfully, questions which may be asked by the other—a pace is set for the divulging of secrets:

ALAN: I'll answer if you answer. In turns.

Pause.

DYSART: Very well. Only we have to speak the truth.⁵⁷

The truth/falsehood binary thus initiated has the effect of focusing the audience's close attention. But is the truth which is to be portrayed so dramatically as illusory as Dr Gifford claimed? Within the parameters of dramatic licence I would argue 'not exactly'. What follows complements in integrity of style what has been carefully prepared for from the outset: Alan's mystifying runic chants, swinging from erotic spirituality to thanotic spirituality, his evasive responses, scenes involving Alan's mother and father showing their deleterious influence on their son's behaviour. As Dysart begins the game with Alan opening and shutting his eyes, he soliloquizes to the audience about the suzerainty of the Normal:

⁵⁶ *St John of the Cross: The Poems*, trans by Roy Campbell (London: The Harvill Press, [1951] 2000), p.27.

⁵⁷ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 9, p.36.

DYSART: The Normal is the good smile in a child's eyes—all right. It is also the dead stare in a million adults. It both sustains and kills—like a God.⁵⁸

We see and hear Dysart's profound regret at, during treatment, his destruction of parts of a patient's unique spirituality:

DYSART: I have cut from them parts of individuality repugnant to this God [i.e. the God of Normality], in both his aspects. Parts sacred to rarer and more wonderful Gods.⁵⁹

With the accompaniment of the 'louder metallic sound on tape' replacing the tapping of his pen, to mark the opening and shutting sequence, Alan is led deeper into hypnosis.

The rest of Scene 19 is a question and answer session under hypnosis where Alan is led deeper and deeper into the realms of his tormented unconscious. We learn that on the stroke of midnight Alan left the house to go to the stables. Shaffer ends the scene with the primordial image of the key which will not just unlock the stable door, but the mystery of Alan's violent behaviour. Scene 20 is a short transitional scene filled with the humming of the Chorus, 'the Equus noise', where Alan enters the stable, the penetralium, the place of the Ha Ha, the 'Holy of Holies' as given in the text, all the horses staring at him, until the horse Nugget is dragged 'into the square as Dysart steps out of it'.⁶⁰

Scene 21 thus formulates a heightened sequence, a vibrant area where we experience Alan's deeper engagement with his God, encouraged by Dysart to mount him, whispering *Equus, Equus, Equus!* so that, astride the equine god, he revolves, in triumphant *jouissance*, a horse/rider 'statue being slowly turned round on a plinth'.⁶¹ The unstable nature of this labile spirituality is conveyed in runic chant: 'The Hosts of Hoover. The Hosts of Philco. The Hosts of Pifco. The Hosts of Remington and all its tribe!'⁶² In this there is a kind of mockery of the very God he worships with its appropriation of language from commercial advertising and Christian liturgy.

The 'Equus noise' increases in volume, suggesting an overwhelming of the ego by the *chora*. In this spiritual phantasmagoria the homo-erotic element reaches a crescendo:

ALAN: I want to be *in* you!

I want to BE you forever and ever!

⁵⁸ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 19, p.65.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.65.

⁶⁰ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 20, p.70.

⁶¹ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 21, p.73.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

*Equus, I love you!*⁶³

The romantic veneer to these outbursts is reminiscent of Cathy's passionate outburst in *Wuthering Heights*: 'I am Heathcliff—he's always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am a pleasure to myself—but as my own being'.⁶⁴ In Kristevan terms, apart from sustaining a romantic trope, the adolescent protagonists in both *Equus* and *Wuthering Heights* experience 'in its dazzling certainty [of belief], its sensory joy [...] a dispossession of self' in an awareness of bliss.⁶⁵ With the reverberating cry 'Make us One Person!', Alan utters a liturgical 'AMEN!' The romantic aspect of the portrayal was not lost on Gifford but he saw this as an attempt by Shaffer to bamboozle the audience with 'a skilful mixture of truth, banality and pretension'.⁶⁶ Here, I would argue, on the contrary, is a sequence skilfully showing a dramatic rendering of a tormented hybrid spirituality in an Eros-oriented register, saturated with psychosis.

The second, ritualistic, heightened sequence involves the blinding of the horses in Act Two, Scene 34. As before, the language of the sequence is couched in homo-erotic imagery. Is Shaffer creating a template for gay spirituality in *Equus*? Critic Michael Billington almost suggests this: 'Alan's equine fixation as a metaphor for same-sex love is made explicit in [Ned] Bennett's production' at the Theatre Royal, Stratford in 2019.⁶⁷ If he is, Shaffer situates it in the labile psychology of adolescence. The fluidity of Alan's psyche provides a foil for Dysart's precarious sanity. He himself has a romantic longing for the sea, an escape from 'this room' which he has occupied 'for too long'.⁶⁸ Dysart wishes to rejuvenate himself spiritually—'I'd like to leave this room and never see it again in my life'—and Alan's beliefs offer a tantalising way out.⁶⁹ If Billington found Bennett's production 'exhilarating' I would argue that the exhilaration was largely due to viewing a complex performed text charged with an arcane spirituality. Dysart's corresponding mental crisis was not lost on Fiona Mountford when she reviewed the same production in the *Evening Standard*: 'As Alan breaks down, so does Martin'.⁷⁰

⁶³ *Equus*, Act One, Scene 21, p.74.

⁶⁴ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Penguin Books, [1847] 2015), p.88.

⁶⁵ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p.8.

⁶⁶ Gifford, p.2.

⁶⁷ Michael Billington, 'Equus review: Peter Shaffer's homo-erotic classic is exhilarating', *The Guardian*, 25 February, 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/feb/25/equus-review-peter-shaffer-horse-blinding-theatre-royal-stratford-east-london-ned-bennett>> [accessed 23.4.20]

⁶⁸ *Equus*, Act Two, Scene 27, p.87.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.87.

⁷⁰ Fiona Mountford., 'Equus review: Mesmerising intensity and intimacy in disturbing modern classic', *Evening Standard*, February 27, 2019,

Having led Alan to relive his attempted intercourse with Jill, the stable hand, and failed, the scene, as written, plays out less in a register of titillating sexuality than in a register of fevered guilt-ridden and thanotic spirituality. Accompanied by the 'faint humming and drumming' sounds of the Chorus/chora, Alan, naked, reveals, with some prompting from Dysart, that the horse-god, moreover its unforgiving presence, had 'seen everything'.⁷¹ The horses were seeing Alan in the dark but Alan did not want to be seen by them. Ravaged by guilt, terrified, he implores Equus to take him back, repents for his sin: 'Eyes!... White eyes—never closed! Eyes like flames—coming—coming!... God seest! God seest!... NO!...' ⁷²

At the point of his quietly soothing 'No more. No more, Equus' it is as if Alan is reframing his belief, slipping back into a new position in his adolescent lability, unsure now if Equus *is* a deity, or a horse. Confused, he 'takes up the invisible pick and fondles Nugget's mask', gently exclaiming 'Equus... Noble Equus... Faithful and True... Godslave... Thou—God—seest—NOTHING!' ⁷³ Thereupon he stabs out Nugget's eyes. What follows is a cataclysmic pandemonium of horses screaming and stamping but with metaphysical overtones of apocalypse as three more horses appear, 'dreadful creatures out of nightmare' ⁷⁴ Arguably, Shaffer means this to be less a scene of barn-storming grand guignol, but more a depiction of terrifying spiritual distress, with a malign outcome.

The two sequences function as vibrant spiritual areas in the drama because of the integrity of approach in the writing and the astuteness with which Shaffer understands the limits of theatre. In spite of a latent absurdity in the presentation, which Gifford appreciated, Shaffer has managed to persuade the reader (and the audience) through the economy of his dramatic style of the *possibility* of a thanotic spirituality, situating it within the context of a vulnerable adolescent psychosis.

If this ability to evoke such darkness in a dramatic work was fuelled by Shaffer's own personal darkness, taking note of his assertion that plays are 'acts of biography', and, perhaps concurring with April De Angelis's view that 'You are the thing that you are exploring', it needs to be remembered that dramatic works are also products of the creative imagination and its transformative dynamics. Alan's blinding of the six horses, within the drama, presents as a compelling glimpse of the ineffable power which drove

<<https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/equus-review-theatre-royal-stratford-east-a4077671.html?>> [accessed 23.4.2020]

⁷¹ *Equus*, Act Two, Scene 34, p.104.

⁷² *Equus*, Act Two, Scene 34, p.105.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁷⁴ *Equus*, Act Two, Scene 34, p.106.

him to do it. If this is a glimpse of the dramatic truth which Gifford perceived as an illusion it is a very affecting one.

***Top Girls*: 'We've all come a long way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements.'**⁷⁵

The toast proposed by Marlene in the opening moments of *Top Girls*, a play which like *Equus*, responds in its own way to a prevailing zeitgeist, that of eighties indifference and self-promotion, is made to a selection of high-achieving women from history, art and fiction, whose lives encompass eleven centuries, gathered together to help her celebrate her promotion as managing director of the Top Girls employment agency. An authorial recognition of a triumphant urge towards transcendence is implied within the words of this toast: 'come a long way', 'to our courage', 'the way we changed our lives', and 'our extraordinary achievements'. But how does Churchill evoke the spiritual bedrock of her suffering, often thwarted, characters? By telling it *slant*, in Emily Dickinson's phrase, and making strategic use of five vibrant areas: heightened sequence, imagery, strategically-placed statement, stage direction and runic chant.

Churchill's astute critique of the lot of women in Thatcherite Britain continues the evocation of repressed spiritualities observed much earlier in Bond's *Saved* and then, more recently, in Shaffer's *Equus*. There is a shared use of myth, as in Shaffer, but with a gendered difference. The gathering in Act One corresponds to the Kristevan notion of 'women's time', situating 'itself outside the linear time of identities', abjuring a masculine provenance and foregrounding 'on the one hand, the archaic (mythical) memory and, on the other, the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movements'.⁷⁶ Churchill places Marlene and her invited friends in their own special feminist spiritual bubble or, sceptically, according to Ann Treneman in her dismissive review of the National Theatre's 2019 revival, at 'the dinner party from heaven'.⁷⁷

As the act unfolds there is a sense that all five women—traveller Isabella Bird, Japanese Imperial courtesan Lady Nijo, Breughel character Dull Gret, gender-hiding Pope Joan, Patient Griselda from Chaucer's *The Clerk's Tale*—know Marlene very well and Marlene knows them. 'You are always so critical of him', says Griselda, suggesting

⁷⁵ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.13.

⁷⁶ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', trans. by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs*, vol 7, no 1 (Autumn 1981), University of Chicago Press, pp.19/20.

⁷⁷ Ann Treneman, 'Review: Top Girls, Lyttleton, SE1' *The Times*, 4.4, 2019<[thetimes.co.uk/article/review-top-girls-lyttleton-set-x012t3jlz](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/review-top-girls-lyttleton-set-x012t3jlz)>

she has been party to much earlier conversations with Marlene about her dissembling husband and that they know each other'.⁷⁸ This sense of Marlene knowing all of them even if she has to introduce some to each other—otherwise why would she invite them?—is flagged up several times throughout the act. They share the highs and low of their life journeys. From the opening, greetings are made suggesting affectionate familiarity:

MARLENE: Here we are. Isabella.
ISABELLA: Congratulations, my dear.⁷⁹

and

MARLENE: Ah Nijo!
She sees LADY NIJO arrive.
NIJO: Marlene!⁸⁰

The familiarity persists on a level beyond the political and beyond the niceties of mere sisterhood. Marlene is facilitating a situation where each of them can listen to the other and, as is common in situations where people have lived for a time under much duress, they are only too eager to speak. As speaking subjects, a space for a shared spirituality has been facilitated by the author where identities can be explored and 'never fixed in place', in Kristevan terms.⁸¹

Churchill situates Marlene's story within the flux and presence of history, thereby allowing a conversation with present and past. To show this across eleven centuries means that contemporary politics as a repressive device is diluted but the damaging effect of living in a patriarchal society still has impact. The initial dramatic conceit suggests that the play is taking place in the world of spirit, 'women's time', but spirit strongly grounded in the feminist human and the mundane. The act bears witness to Marlene's otherwise suppressed imagination and wonder, a spiritual cornucopia concreted over as time goes on by the demands of 'normal' life and secular ambitions. The dramatic structure of the play retains its dreamlike fragmented propulsion towards a narrower and bleaker vision of personal worlds lacking in healthy spiritual autonomies.

Heightened Sequence

That Marlene knows all these characters and has a chatty familiarity with them suggests that the scene is taking place in a particular dimension of the real; hyper-real to the point of being played out in the world of spirit. The real, for Kristeva, involves

⁷⁸ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.22.

⁷⁹ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.1.

⁸⁰ *Top Girls*, Act One, p. 2.

⁸¹ Noelle MacAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.105.

acceptance of the authenticity of the innate drives of the imaginary, drives which may include the spiritual, 'semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother'.⁸² Marlene is placed therefore in the role not only of host but as mother, ironic considering the later reveal of her maternal neglect in Act Three. Here the real encompasses the accessed interior world of the characters, the geography of which is slowly divulged by means of dramatic, overlapping monologues. This dramatic complexity makes Act One of *Top Girls* a vibrant area in itself: precarious, suppressed autonomous spiritualities of the *dramatis personae* evoked in a sustained and heightened sequence of text. This vibrant area cannot be neatly pigeon-holed into just one of the three modes because, provokingly, it has elements of all three.

Newspaper critics describe the opening act in various ways: 'a brilliant fantasia' (Harold Atkins, *Daily Telegraph*), 'an assault on the senses' (Helen Lewis, *New Statesman*) and 'exquisite and stylish' (Anne Mc Ferran, *Time Out*). The consensus among theatre critics is that it is 'theatrical' and 'engaging', opinions still expressed in academic assessments. Mary Luckhurst, for the academics, thinks Act One is less fantasia, more 'a schema for Churchill's feminist critique of the period'.⁸³ Churchill as a socialist-feminist playwright is given the most critical attention in academic studies, *Top Girls* seen largely as Churchill's 'Thatcherite play'. For Elaine Aston, there is a matrix of intrasexual oppression showing 'an inability to listen to and share experiences with women'.⁸⁴ Phillip Roberts opines that the 'theatrical audacity and the sheer fun of the anticipation serve to put aside the concerns of naturalism and logic'.⁸⁵ Sophie Bush acknowledges 'a fantasy setting' for the Act 'which sits outside real time, as we understand it'.⁸⁶

No critic has suggested that Act One functions as a framing device for the thwarted spiritual lives of its characters, an indication as to what is missing in their lives, and, by implication, what is missing in Marlene's life. Alicia Tyler may be implying something like this by stating 'While Marlene is evidently a contemporary character, the rest of the characters have apparently materialised for dinner. The characters all accept her reality as normal, having their acquaintance with Marlene in common'.⁸⁷ The word 'materialise'

⁸² Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p.27.

⁸³ Mary Luckhurst, *Caryl Churchill* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 91.

⁸⁴ Elaine Aston, *Caryl Churchill* (Tavistock: Northcote House, [1997] 2001), p.39.

⁸⁵ Philip Roberts, *About Churchill: the Playwright and the Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 83.

⁸⁶ Sophie Bush, ed, *Caryl Churchill: Top Girls* (London: Methuen Drama, 2018), p.41.

⁸⁷ Alicia Tyler, *Caryl Churchill's Top Girls* (London: Continuum, 2008), p.48.

carries the broader meaning of 'ghost or spirit appearing in bodily form' according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary.⁸⁸ Less this reading appear far-fetched, Philip Roberts reminds us that original titles for the sequence were 'Marlene's Dinner with the Dead' and 'Ms Dante's Inferno'.⁸⁹

The world of the erotically spiritual is subtly indicated by default, by hinting at what is *not* portrayed. The repetition of the phrase 'There was nothing in my life...' emphasises the spiritual emptiness each woman has experienced. 'There was nothing, nothing in my life without the Emperor's favour' (Nijo). 'There was nothing in my life except my studies'. (Joan).⁹⁰ Beneath the fierce overlapping chatter Kristeva's void haunts the play as Marlene's comment reveals when Isabella and Nigo say they once reached a point where they felt their lives were over:

MARLENE: Yes, when I first came to London, I sometimes...and when I got back from America, I did.⁹¹

Repeated expressions of spiritual desolation like this evoke the soul-destroying effects of profound personal choices in the context of the repressions of patriarchal societies. The gathering of the sisterhood itself can be seen as a moment of spiritual discovery in the face of societal repression. Travel and movement forward, up the ladder of success perhaps, does not bring satisfaction on the profoundest level. *Top Girls* maps this in its working back to the beginning, chronologically in Act Three. In this sense the play can be understood as a modern tale of spiritual quest and spiritual absence. The structure of the play promotes this interpretation by working backwards from the (misleading) sense of triumph in the dinner party of Act One, to a keener awareness of Marlene's actual achievement and its crass downside in Act Two, to the final revelation of maternal neglect and spiritual indifference in Act Three. The revelations in Act Three rewrite the story of Marlene's spiritual trajectory.

Act One has a direct through-line to Act Three and Marlene's heartfelt, ambiguous Strategically-Placed Statement 'I still have dreams', one of several vibrant areas in the text functioning as spiritually-potent moments.⁹² But it is also a through-line to Marlene's misdirected autonomous spirituality as expressed in her Thatcher-esque 'I believe in the individual. Look at me'.⁹³ A stance revealing, according to Frank Rich in his review for

⁸⁸ *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition (revised), ed. by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 880.

⁸⁹ Philip Roberts, p. 81.

⁹⁰ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.12.

⁹¹ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.7.

⁹² *Top Girls*, Act Three, p. 85.

⁹³ *Top Girls*, Act Three, p.84.

the original 1982 Royal Court production on Broadway, that 'Marlene's own emotional life and sexual life as barren as Lady MacBeth's.'⁹⁴

Although some critics such as Elaine Aston have seen the play as embodying an anti-capitalist stance in critiquing the emotional sterility of Thatcher's Britain,⁹⁵ Churchill, in the way the play is structured overall—'elastic' is Benedict Nightingale's word—implies that deeper values are also lacking in the protagonists which may have little or nothing to do with the patriarchal bias of the times.⁹⁶ Those values, by implication are compassion, emotional honesty and love. In an early draft, according to Max Stafford Clark, the original director, Act One took the form of 'a series of monologues' with no intercutting or dramatic scene structure.⁹⁷ A sense of lives battling the 'void' clearly emerged during the creative process of structuring the dinner party which then lifted the drama into a spiritual register. In this drink, though not drug-fuelled, dinner-party, Marlene seems to know, like Kristeva, that 'a word of love is often a more effective, profound and durable treatment [of mental illness] than electro-shock therapy or psychotropic drugs'.⁹⁸ In the play genuine words of love are rarely spoken. Apart from the opening act, the spiritual register rarely approaches the Eros-oriented but remains relentlessly neutral, problematising analytical findings of the spiritual in a text which seems determined to exclude all evidence of it. Oppressive forms of ambition and self-seeking operate in such ways as to crush the human spirit so that few illuminatory signs of it are left. We see this in the short scenes of interview.

Indeed the abrasive overlapping style underscores and dramatizes Thatcher's notorious dictum that 'there is no such thing as society'.⁹⁹ Throughout the act the women, in their excitement, do not so much talk to each other as talk over each other. Churchill shows, interspersing the agonised confessionals with characteristic humour, that all need to be allowed to repeat their stories *ad nauseam* as if acting out a collective purgative ritual of grief:

⁹⁴ Frank Rich, 'Stage: Caryl Churchill's Top Girls at the Public', *New York Times*, 29.12.1982 <[nytimes.com/1982/12/29/theatre/stage-caryl-churchill-s-top-girls-at-the-public.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/29/theatre/stage-caryl-churchill-s-top-girls-at-the-public.html)> [accessed 8.2.22]

⁹⁵ Elaine Aston, *Caryl Churchill, Second Edition* (Northcote House:Tavistock, [1997] 2001), pp. 42-44.

⁹⁶ Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, qtd by Sophie Bush in *Caryl Churchill: Top Girls* (London: Methuen Drama, 2019), p. 19.

⁹⁷ Interview by Sophie Bush, February 17, 2017, *Top Girls* (London: Methuen Drama, 2018), p. 8.

⁹⁸ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love*, p.78.

⁹⁹ Douglas Keay, *Interview for Woman's Own*, September 23, 1987, <<https://www.margarethatthatcher.org/document/106689>> [accessed 10.4.20.]

ISABELLA: My father was the mainspring of my life and when he died I was so grieved. I'll have the chicken please / and the soup.¹⁰⁰

Churchill infers that Marlene's bringing these disparate unhappy women together for a meal is a kindly act of charity and social concern, facilitating yet another chance (for they have clearly met before) to rehearse sadness and loss. The choice of characters suits Churchill's dramatic purpose i.e. to show what is missing from their lives but at the same time refusing to name it. If characters such as Emily Dickinson, Lady Ottoline Morell, Joan of Arc, Eleanor Roosevelt and Chaucer's Prioress had been chosen to populate Act One the play may have gone in an entirely different direction.

Marlene's decency and generosity in this opening act unravels in the backwards-unfolding text as we see her adopt masculine traits of aggression and indifference to achieve what she wants in life. Her mantra becomes 'up, up, up' and her personal urge towards transcendence becomes a twisted longing for money and power.¹⁰¹ By Act Three we learn the price she has had to pay for this success: two abortions and the heartless rejection of her mother, sister and daughter. Marlene's personal autonomous, non-religious spirituality has not only been misdirected by her over-riding ambitious instincts and personal politics but has, on the evidence of her breakdown in Act Three, atrophied and gone awry. For Kristeva this again would indicate a destabilised subject searching for stabilisation through any means. These means are dramatised in Act Two, showing Marlene's studied indifference to interviewees and other employees, the fraught relationship with her sister Joyce, and hero worship from her own daughter, Angie, who she has rejected in favour of personal success: 'She's a bit thick. She's a bit funny. [...] She's not going to make it'.¹⁰²

The trajectory of the play shows how spirituality is revealed incrementally and minimally through various literary devices and structures that compose the vibrant areas. From the opening dinner party of Act One sheltering a troubled sisterhood, including the silent hardworking waitress who, at least it can be seen, is given employment, through to the demonstrative Act Two showing how the self-centred urge towards success works out in practice, to Act Three which shows how spiritual lives are neutralised and sacrificed from the start on the altar of mammon.

Vibrant areas in these later, more realistic, sections of the play fall into brief pericopes of language. The strategic facilitators evoking misdirected spiritualities are imagery and strategically-placed statement, vibrant areas found in the work of previous

¹⁰⁰ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.4.

¹⁰¹ *Top Girls*, Act Three, p. 83.

¹⁰² *Top Girls*, Act Two, Scene Three, p.66.

dramatists, and initially in the practice-as-research plays, and clearly in common usage. Act One does not therefore evoke spirituality at all in any traditional sense: the mundane banter, the setting of the London restaurant meal, and sharing of stories, personal trauma and survival see to that. But Churchill has sly subtle fun hinting at the unspoken spiritual nature of the proceedings in the shared meal, with its suggestion of a strange eucharist, in exchanges such as the above and in informed discussions of various theological positions, using Pope Joan as her mouthpiece:

JOAN: 'St Augustine maintained that the neo-platonic ideas are indivisible from God but I agreed with John that the created

ISABELLA: Buddhism is really most uncomfortable.

JOAN: world is essences derived from ideas which derived from God. As Denys the Aeropagite said—the pseudo-Denys—first we give God a name, then deny it¹⁰³

This last exchange can be seen as paradigmatic of a shared quest for spirituality, not linked to religion, which Churchill shows all her characters are involved in in one way or another.

Marlene's compassion and insight in Act One fixes the scene in the register of the spiritual showing Churchill's concern for the spiritual life of her flawed, very human characters. Indeed critic Henry Hitchings, in his review of the 2019 production, considered that 'an argument was being made for compassion and a sharp look at social inequality, demanding a place at the table for women all backgrounds.'¹⁰⁴ The way forward for these characters, Churchill implies through omission, is by way of the virtues which are suppressed for one reason or another: compassion, love, concern, openness. These qualities alone are the way through darkness which Marlene seeks and this is only momentarily realised in her tears in Act Three which provide a momentary awakening. The wake-up call is not heeded.

Act One therefore presents the action in a heightened sequence of the spiritual which can be easily missed owing to the ongoing comic tone. It's as if spirituality, in very circumspect autonomous mode, is being presented as an alternative 'real' but far removed from the ethos which may have been evoked by orthodox Christian theology or even Buddhist belief. Churchill's concerned debate about layers of reality in theatre and

¹⁰³ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.10.

¹⁰⁴ Henry Hitchings, 'Top Girls review: Caryl Churchill's sharp take on women's struggle still has topical bite', *Evening Standard*, 4.4.2019<standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/top-girls-review-caryl-churchill's-sharp-take-on-women's-struggle-still-has-topical-bite—a4109051html> [accessed 8.2.22]

possible spiritual dimensions are revisited, again in superficially comic tone, in short heightened sequences such as 'God' in a later play, *Love and Information*.¹⁰⁵

Imagery

Images of London and America function as potent images of mirage-like, false transcendence for Marlene and her daughter Angie, much as Moscow does to the three sisters in Anton Chekhov's play.¹⁰⁶ These vibrant areas function as indicators of the crisis of spirituality in a materialistic age where the spiritual urge is subsumed into a materialistic yearning. Even adverts of the time hijacked the language of spirituality for materialistic purposes: 'A quiet place for contemplation' (Subaru car advertisement, 1982).¹⁰⁷

We learn in Act One that Marlene has been to both cities when she concurs with Nijo and Isabella that a certain emptiness had set in when she first visited London and on her return from America. This refers forward to Act Three where she views both cities as spiritual goals, escapes from the repressive parental home, in her reply to Joyce:

MARLENE: America, America, you're jealous. / I had to get out.¹⁰⁸

If America was an illusory image of transcendence for Marlene in a monetary way, exuding 'the American dream' perhaps, and she felt her life was over 'for a few hours' on her return, the dream nevertheless persisted for Marlene as a transcendent but false lure. For her daughter Angie, influenced in her simple-minded way by 'Aunty' Marlene's travels and success. America holds unfulfilled promise, as indicated by the postcards she has received from Marlene: 'I want to go to America, will you take me?' and 'I want to be American'.¹⁰⁹ For Angie, Marlene is living a life of enviable glamour and to follow her may result in spiritual and financial transformation. Here Churchill subtly hints at New Age spiritualities and their fixation with financial gain.

In connection with the above images is the image of travel as a form of perceived spiritual liberation which recurs throughout the play. Elaine Aston comments on travel as a form of geographical mobility whereby 'women seeking jobs through the employment agency [...] equate travel with career opportunities'.¹¹⁰ But Churchill's use of the travel

¹⁰⁵ *Love and Information* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2012), p.50.

¹⁰⁶ Anton Chekhov, *Three Sisters* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, [1900]1964), p.250.

¹⁰⁷ Subaru advert

¹⁰⁸ *Top Girls*, Act Three, p.85.

¹⁰⁹ *Top Girls*, Act Three, p.75.

¹¹⁰ Elaine Aston, *Caryl Churchill*, p. 43.

image implies far more than that: Isabella and Nijo need travel as a form of spiritual refreshment and change:

NIJO: Out of favour but I didn't die. I left on foot, nobody, saw me go. For the next twenty years I walked through Japan.

and

ISABELLA: I was determined to leave my grief behind and set off for Tibet.¹¹¹

For all the invited guests travel is more than a means of getting from one place to another. Travel is an image of the urge to transcend, to rise about current circumstances and, in that, Churchill taps into a very modern trope. Joan's journey to Rome is a form of spiritual motion through travel. Even Dull Gret agrees 'Walking is good' as her aside to Nijo.¹¹²

In Act Two a confused Angie, in the backyard duologue, suggests travelling to New Zealand, to London, the Odeon, to almost anywhere, for various reasons, eventually saying to her younger friend Kit: 'You'll all wake up one morning and find I'm gone'.¹¹³

In Act Three travel becomes the focus of an extended argument between Marlene and Joyce in which Marlene confesses: 'Of course I could not get out of here fast enough'.¹¹⁴ Spiritual restlessness is, Churchill implies, at once an effect of capitalist society's repression of women and a spirituality misdirected in the pursuit of money and personal survival.

Darkness functions as an image of spiritual desolation. In Act Two, Scene Two, Angie confides an experience of the uncanny to Kit. A picture fell off the wall during the night. Angie fears she have moved it (through telekinesis) and then she heard a dead kitten crying in the dark. The following sequence is freighted with spiritual angst and fearfulness:

ANGIE: I heard it last night.

KIT: Where?

ANGIE: Out here. In the dark. What if I left you in the dark all night?¹¹⁵

There follows some worried exchanges about supernatural awareness and whether Kit would be able to 'see anything'.¹¹⁶ What Kit experiences is controlled by Angie, just as

¹¹¹ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.12.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.12.

¹¹³ *Top Girls*, Act Two, Scene Two, p.39.

¹¹⁴ *Top Girls*, Act Three, p.79.

¹¹⁵ *Top Girls*, Act Two, Scene 2, p.35.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.35.

what Angie wants to experience is influenced by Marlene. False spiritualities, Churchill implies, are learnt within the confines of family and friends.

Strategically-Placed Statement

'I am dead already' is said suddenly, early on in Act One, by Lady Nijo as the silent Waitress brings in the first course. The vibrant area containing this statement has autonomous spiritual repercussions in a thanotic register from then onward. Having tried to quash Pope Joan's relentless enthusiasm about religion and, possibly angry at Isabella's statement that 'There are some barbaric practices in the East', she shares her feelings: 'Religion is a kind of nothing / and I dedicated what was left of me to nothing'.¹¹⁷ Noticing Nijo's subdued tone, Marlene encourages her to have more wine. Nijo though is insistent:

NIJO: Haven't you ever felt like that? Nothing will ever happen again. I am dead already.¹¹⁸

What seems like an expression of despair is a layered statement about spiritual desolation, pointing to the mystical /religious spectrum, no doubt remembered from Nijo's experience as a nun. The phrase is strategically placed within the first ten minutes after a discussion on the inadequacies of religious belief. Its function is to trigger the awareness of the void among the guests as they share their stories. Nijo is not fully understood by Marlene and Isabella who nonetheless try to share what they understand are similar experiences with her. Churchill reveals here and elsewhere darker resonances in these women's experiences. In the world of spirit, 'I am dead already' has a darkly ironic tone of a spiritual dark night which underpins all their achievements.

'I still have dreams' is an ambiguous layered statement made by Marlene in Act Three which evokes the nightmares she still experiences as a result of a dysfunctional home background and simultaneously presents as a poignant statement of the recurrent dreams of escape and success. All five characters in Act One have had their dreams ameliorated in some way although they are feted by posterity in that their fame or notoreity is recorded. Marlene's statement, charged with spiritual ambiguity in autonomous mode evading the erotic and the thanotic, is conflated with Joyce's following sarcastic comments about America and Marlene's reassertion of America as, for her, a deceptive image of transcendence.

¹¹⁷ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.7.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7.

‘The eighties are going to be stupendous.’ Marlene expresses a world of misplaced hope in this statement in an Eros-oriented autonomous mode as, in her younger incarnation, she is possessed by the spirit of the age. At the outset, yet ironically at the end of the play, materialism is shown to be her religion and everything else subjugated to it. Forever on the move, Marlene’s skewed autonomous spirituality never has a present, is always dependent on moving towards a future goal. The character’s amoral trajectory is presented through Churchill’s relentlessly moral lens which admits small moments of spiritual ambivalence.

Stage Direction

‘MARLENE cries’ is an example of a genuine embryonic autonomous non-religious spirituality trying to emerge through a stage direction in these unhappy characters.¹¹⁹ A non-verbal communication, representative of Kristeva’s pre-linguistic *chora* from where spiritual growth emerges and grows, crying functions here as a cutting across all societal and familial negative influences to express a genuine sense of self. For Marlene though, although she appreciates its value—‘I like it’—she cannot learn from her own emotional breakdown.¹²⁰

MARLENE: I was afraid of this
I only came because I thought you wanted
I just want...¹²¹

Neither can her immediate family help her. Joyce responds with a joke: ‘Everybody’s always crying in this house. Nobody takes any notice’.¹²² The crying does put Marlene in touch with her true self, releasing autonomously, in an Eros-oriented register, an appreciation of love: ‘You’ve been wonderful looking after Angie’.¹²³ Marlene’s expression of love is dismissed by Joyce as an effect of alcohol. Churchill shows how the machinations of society, even at this level, tend to bracket out the spiritual.

In Act One two characters are told not to cry when their sense of loss and suffering becomes too much in the telling. Joan, in particular, is seen to espouse these ‘masculine’ values of emotional repression but after a manic repetition of prayer in the climax of Act One, ‘Joan’, according to the stage direction, ‘gets up and is sick in a corner’.¹²⁴ Again, the sickness, like the crying, suggests a painful upsurge and de-

¹¹⁹ *Top Girls*, Act Three, p.81

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.81.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.82

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.82.

¹²⁴ *Top Girls*, Act One, p. 29.

stabilising moment of natural spiritual awareness; as Kristeva put it: 'giving birth to myself in the violence of sobs, of vomit'.¹²⁵ A genuine, if suppressed, spirituality of love and care is offered no room in this dysfunctional menage.

In the stage direction 'NIJO is laughing and crying' because she is spiritually distraught and no words can convey the psychic tumult she feels.¹²⁶ Marlene finds spiritual oblivion in the stage direction 'MARLENE is drinking ISABELLA's brandy'.¹²⁷

Runic Chant

At the end of Act One (pages 27-29), Joan's relentlessly manic Latin chants, taken from Lucretius, are a desperate attempt to find spiritual sustenance through learned behaviour but which prove ultimately barren and pointless:

JOAN: Something something something mortisque timores

tum vacuum pectus – damn.

Quod si ridicula

something something something on and in and something splendorem purpureai.¹²⁸

The technique of inundation, coined originally by late dramatist Stephen Jeffreys, is used here in the seemingly endless half-remembered chanting, signalling an erosion of spiritual commitment.¹²⁹ Through this playwriting device Joan's assumed religious spirituality is exposed for what it is—a sham—with her real autonomous spiritual life possibly unknown to herself and the world. As Kristeva puts it, 'In both religion [and psychoanalysis] a destabilised subject constantly searches for stabilisation'.¹³⁰ Pope Joan's spiritual desperation, expressed in the 'stabilising' language of church Latin, parallels Alan Strang's coded singing in *Equus*, albeit using television jingles instead of Latin.

All are so miserable in *Top Girls* because the capacity to develop a sustaining autonomous feminist spirituality of love and care has been thwarted either by circumstances, by life choices, patriarchal attitudes or often all three together. Act One begins with a last-ditch attempt by Marlene to re-claim a fragile spirituality of love and care for her and her friends by rehearsing the past and trying to make sense of it in the

¹²⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3.

¹²⁶ *Top Girls*, Act One, p.29.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.29.

¹²⁸ *Top Girls*, Act Three, p. 28.

¹²⁹ Stephen Jeffreys, *Playwriting* (London: Nick Hern Books,2019), pp.72-74.

¹³⁰ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love*, p. 19.

present. What follows is heavily ironic and tragic after the hopefulness Churchill has set up in this opening Act. With the relentless side-lining in the play of authentic spiritual growth as a casualty of life, no wonder Angie's last word in the play is 'Frightening'. Yet there is a sense that all may not have been so frightening if the individual characters had been able to act differently. Frank Rich's luke-warm review for the *New York Times* laments 'the absence of the middle range—of women who achieve without imitating power-crazed men and denying their own humanity'.¹³¹ But in creating her dramatic scenario is not Churchill implying just this? And showing how flickers of spirit may survive in the most inhospitable circumstances?

Conclusion

Shaffer and Churchill's heightened sequences allow for oblique, even twisted evocations of spirituality to achieve dramatic life. Likewise imagery, sound, stage direction, strategically-placed statement and runic chant, devices common to both plays, evoke ontological undercurrents of autonomous, if awry, spirituality permeating the texts. In this both playwrights evoke an interim seventies/eighties trajectory bridging the minimalism of Bond with the resurgence of the powerful oblique spirituality of Kane.

Shaffer, in *Equus*, maps the desperate ways two protagonists, Alan Strang and Martin Dysart, access precarious spiritualities which do not suffice as sustainable ontological positions but, in their disturbed expressions, remain at an embryonic level of development. In these portrayals the dramatist provokingly challenges the reductionist tendencies of the seventies, using vibrant areas to suggest alternative ways of understanding social behaviour.

As Dysart says at the end, he 'needs a way of seeing in the dark'. Kristeva's concept of mankind's ongoing spiritual adolescence, with its pre-religious need to believe, pertains to both characters, illuminating the vibrant areas of text where this need is dramatised.¹³²

Churchill, in *Top Girls*, portrays characters also at vulnerable embryonic stages of their gendered spiritual lives, suppressed and fixated there by societal circumstances or by male control yet still able to achieve much in life, even if, in the case of Nijo and Patient Griselda, that achievement is mainly the ability to survive. Vibrant areas in *Top Girls* suggest, by omission, alternative views to eighties cynicism and greed,

¹³¹ Frank Rich, 'Stage: Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* at the Public', *New York Times*, 29.12.1982.

¹³² Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible need to Believe*, p.14.

emphasising the need for a life-affirming, non-frightening culture of listening, emotional honesty and compassion.

As it is, Marlene's way of seeing in the dark is to construct a false non-religious spirituality which allows her to achieve material success at the expense of deeper personal values. Psychic life, as revealed through actions, according to Kristevan theory, is 'a discourse that acts whether it harms you or saves you. You are its subject'.¹³³ In *Top Girls*, psychic life at once harms and saves while providing ways forward for the individual soul which are not always satisfactory.

The way a playwright employs strategies to evoke the spiritualities of characters behaving *in extremis* is explored in the next chapter. Mapping the dissimilar spiritual trajectories in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis* reveals the obdurate presence in playwriting of the spiritual impulse.

¹³³ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* trans. by Ross Gubermann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p.6.

Chapter Six

Sarah Kane: Opening the Curtains

No God. No Father Christmas. No Fairies. No Narnia. No fucking nothing.¹

Sarah Kane

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.²

Leonard Cohen

Jay Twomey's critique 'Blasted Hope: Theology and Violence in Sarah Kane' interrogates Kane's play thematically through a Christian theological lens and, evoking 'a tradition reaching backwards from Jürgen Moltmann to Aquinas and ultimately to Paul', looks for evidence that *Blasted* is a hopeful play without actually pinpointing anywhere in the text where this may occur.³ Kane herself said that '*Blasted* is a hopeful play. I don't find my plays depressing or lacking in hope'.⁴ If hope is a feature of this play, as Kane says, and indeed, arguably, of *4.48 Psychosis*, what other evidence is there in the text of an urge towards transcendence? Is the hope in *Blasted* and in *4.48 Psychosis* simply evidence of an inherited Christian provenance, as Twomey suggests, or is there a more nuanced, more richly-textured and variable range of transcendent initiatives, indeed of spirituality, in the texts' layered stratas? Moreover, initiatives be objectified via Kristevan insights and evaluations?

Given that Twomey's is a theological study, it is surprising that spirituality itself is not mentioned. Twomey's view suggests that, having 'turned atheist', Kane no longer had access to spirituality at all and therefore the play (only) 'evinces a consistent effort

¹ Sarah Kane, *Blasted* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2002 [1995], p.55

² Leonard Cohen, *Anthem*, Album 10, *The Future*, November 1992
<<https://www.leonardcohenfiles.com/album.html>> [accessed 10.11.2016]

³ Jay Twomey, 'Blasted Hope: Theology and Violence in Sarah Kane', *Journal of Religion and Theatre*, vol 6, no 2, Fall, 2007, pp.110-123 (p. 11). Twomey finds evidence of hope in 'the fragmentary narratives of other characters' but not as a feature of the dramatic text. p.118.

⁴ Aleks Sierz, 'Sarah Kane: an Interview', *New Writing for the British Stage*, January 2016 (November 2005) <https://www.sierz.co.uk/writings/sarah-kane-an-interview>[accessed October 20, 2016]

on her part to grapple with key motifs from her Christian upbringing'.⁵ This view does not allow for Kane, the dramatist, retaining, as a functioning, speaking human being, the capacity for expressing a non-religious autonomous spirituality in her characters, Eros-oriented or otherwise, which 'opens us up to the world', in André Comte-Sponville's words, and suffuses the grappling in the text with an articulating energy.⁶ Distanced though they may be from her early Christian influences, Kane's two plays nevertheless occupy that processual place in 'the realm of imagination, play, and possibility where even calculation becomes renewal and creation.'⁷ In Kristevan terms, Kane's work 'refuses to be confined within the narrow bounds of rationalism' and is open to facets of the spiritual.⁸ Within their own artistic economies, *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis* reach for transcendence on a variety of levels.

Blasted was written at university in Britain, in one act subdivided into five scenes, during a time-period encompassing the Bosnian War of 6 April, 1992, to 14 December, 1995. Kane developed an acute sense of horror at the daily atrocities and war crimes of the combatants even though the war was only intermittently reported in the British media. As she herself said, after watching televisual reportage, 'The logical conclusion of the attitude that produces an isolated rape in England is the rape camps in Bosnia'.⁹ Her playwriting can be seen as a profound response to the atrocities of war. *Blasted* was misjudged and vilified by some reviewers.¹⁰ Nevertheless her passionate vision admits a nuanced awareness of societal complexity: 'I do think that the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peace time civilisation'.¹¹ Within the negation of war is to be found vibrant minutiae of the human spirit. In my practice play *The Ruth Ellis Show*, the sequence beginning 'The second world war is still going on...' shares a similar perspective. For Ruth Ellis, as for the protagonists in *Blasted*, the loom of war in peacetime presents as a continuing danger but also as a catalytic scenario for spiritual

⁵ Twomey, p.110. Theologians, such as Kees Waaijman, are beginning to recognise a wider spectrum for spirituality. Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: a Multi-Faceted Phenomenon*, Studies in Spirituality, 17, (2007), pp.1-113.

⁶ André Comte-Sponville, *The Book of Atheist Spirituality* (London: Bantam Books, 2009 [2006]), p.206.

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 62

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.62.

⁹ Aleks Sierz, *In Yer Face Drama: British Theatre Today* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), pp.100-101.

¹⁰ Notably by Jack Tinker as 'this disgusting feast of filth' in his review for the *Daily Mail*, 19 January, 1995.

¹¹ Sierz, p.101.

emergence. The writing of the play produced insights into the spiritual dimension of the text which helped formulate a methodological means for finding spirituality in other plays.

4.48 Psychosis, written and appearing five years later in 2000 during a time of personal trauma, can be seen as a heroic response to the destructive invasion of mental illness and its attempt to colonise the mind of a human being. In the text spirituality fights to overcome the invasion which fragments sense, narrative and language itself. Vibrant areas in this text of this play evoke particular triumphant moments of spiritual transcendence amid the suffering. These moments are woven into a compelling dramatic pattern so much so that discussing patterning first became essential in revealing the embeddedness of the spiritual in the play. In *Blasted* vibrant areas were found to respond to the destructive spiritual scenario of a more physical invasion: a time of war. The nineties in war-torn Europe became for Kane a fertile source of dramatic inspiration.

In agreeing with Twomey's sense of the end scene in *Blasted* being resonant of 'the possibility of a transformed world'¹² and, moreover, paradigmatic of the playwright's larger concerns, I will unpack some aspects of the rich imagery in this scene which seems to be emblematic and indicative of much of the layered spirituality to be found both in *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis*. The layered spirituality divulges evidence of Kane's awareness of various permutations of the spiritual, echoes the way spirituality emerged in *Saved* and negative Thanatos-oriented manifestations in *Equus*. In making a case for this, I will reference the taxonomy of terms alluded to in *Chapter One: Defining Spirituality*.

***Blasted*: 'You take me to another place.'**¹³

When Ian says to Cate 'When I am with you I can't think of anything else. You take me to another place' at the beginning of Scene One, the image of 'another place' is emblematic not only of a move to a place of the psyche where he has never ventured but, more dramaturgically, indicative of a subsequent interior move to a place of the spirit which he has never envisaged.¹⁴ This momentary expression of joy indicates an autonomous erotic spirituality of love as delineated by Julia Kristeva, discovering 'the

¹² Twomey, p.116.

¹³ *Blasted*, 1, p.22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.22.

essence of the other',¹⁵ even though short-lived, as well as signalling the quest for growth and relatedness suggested by John Coates and David Hay.¹⁶

For biologist David Hay, as seen in *Chapter One*, spirituality was all about 'relational consciousness', biologically built into human nature.¹⁷ This concept extends the understanding 'beyond religious belief since the criterion is 'relationship' and not religion'.¹⁸ For Kristeva, such relationality is an essential aspect of psycho-analytic healing and there are brief passages exemplifying this healing aspect in vibrant areas in Kane's harrowing text. Twomey's critique does not allow for any within-character transformative movement of the spirit: any urge towards transcendence is via the related experience of other invoked characters. Ian's development of a real relationship with Cate is a hard-won condition mapped out in the unfolding of the drama. Cate recognizes Ian's experience: 'It's like that when I have a fit.'¹⁹ Kane sets up, from the outset, the possibility of parallel transcendent worlds which co-exist within her main characters' experience with the mundane and dystopian.

The movement of a character being transported in the play inwardly from a place of cynicism and exploitation, in the opening scenes, to a kind of redemption through suffering in the closing moments, has been recognised by critics such as Elaine Aston, Ken Urban and Dan Rebellato. According to Aston, the outcome of *Blasted* 'rests on the redemptive possibility of love';²⁰ Urban holds that 'Kane emerges from calamity with the possibility that ethics can exist between wounded bodies, that after devastation, good becomes possible';²¹ and Rebellato simply insists that 'what Kane was writing about was love.'²² In Kristevan terms the reclamation of love as a saving human dynamic permeates Kane's playtext as 'a new kind of love story'.²³ This development can be mapped from the opening scene to the very end of the play, but, for the purposes of this chapter, I trace the development back from the final scene which brings together several

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love*, p.56.

¹⁶ John Coates, 'Introduction', *Spirituality and Social Work*, ed.by Diana Coholic, John R. Graham and Janet Groen (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2007),p.135; David Hay, *Why Spirituality is Difficult for Westerners* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.13,14.

¹⁷ David Hay, *Why Spirituality is Difficult for Westerners*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Hay, p. 14.

¹⁹ *Blasted*, 1, p. 22.

²⁰ Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.15.

²¹ Ken Urban, 'An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane', *PAJ* 69, vol 23, no 3, September 2001, pp.36-46 (p.37)

²² Dan Rebellato, 'Sarah Kane: An Appreciation', *New Theatre Quarterly* 59, vol 15, part 3, August 1999, pp. 280-281 (p 280).

²³ Julia Kristeva, p..3

modes of spirituality in one transcendent image. Much like the dominant images which constellate Edward Bond's plays as argued by Richard Scharine 'in the light of which all other actions must be considered'.²⁴ Certainly in the two Kane plays being considered there are dominant images which crystallise action and motive, but not all of them evoke spirituality. Walter Benjamin's sense that 'the image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation' helps clarify the resonance.²⁵ Benjamin talks about the image being 'dialectics at a standstill'.²⁶ The final images in *Blasted* function in this dialectical way, referring back to what has gone before. Again, I am looking at how imagery functions as a vibrant area and becomes a conduit for the spiritual.

Vibrant areas found and analysed in *Blasted* are therefore: imagery, minimal appearance, oblique manifestation, patterning and stratification. All facilitate the fitful emergence of spirituality in the text rather than the more sustained manifestations in the previously cited canonical works. The fitful nature of the emergence of spirituality in text becomes even more strained and obscure in *4.48 Psychosis* with its severe dramatic economy regarding the spiritual and evident in the vibrant areas of patterning, imagery, minimal appearance, oblique manifestation and silence.

Vibrant Areas: Imagery

Cynical journalist Ian has lured simple-minded, epileptic Cate to a hotel room in Leeds, ostensibly for love-making, to continue an abusive affair, but also, as we realise from Cate's early remark 'Looks like there's a war on' to escape from outside alien forces.²⁷ This scenario is compounded by the intrusion of a traumatised Soldier who taunts and rapes Ian while Cate has managed to escape in search of food. With a bomb exploding and further blasting any semblance of normality the situation might have had, Kane uses the growing sensitisation of the characters through trauma, in which the rescue and death of a baby (making an irrefutable thematic link back to Bond), allows several lacunae of spirituality to emerge in the text, developing schematically (although with startling, unexpected placements) to a final hybrid spirituality which combines heartfelt yearning in clear Christian imagery.

²⁴ Richard Scharine, *The Plays of Edward Bond* (London: Associated University Press, 1976), p. 273.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belnap Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 463.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

²⁷ *Blasted*, 2, p.33.

The closing scene where Cate feeds a dying Ian food and drink has been interpreted in various ways without arguing, as I do, that this scene, in having a eucharistic aspect, reaches an acme of cumulative and layered spirituality which concentrates much of the forward spiritual movement in one climactic image expressed in Ian's words 'Thank you':²⁸

She feeds Ian with the remaining food.

She pours gin in Ian's mouth,

She finishes feeding Ian and sits apart from him, huddled for warmth.

She drinks the gin.

She sucks her thumb.

Silence.

It rains.

Ian Thank you.

*Blackout.*²⁹

The word eucharist, with its Greek origin, meaning 'thanksgiving', refers to the breaking of bread in the Christian sacrament of communion, in which people—members of church congregation—share the body of Christ under the appearance of bread and wine. Kane, though distanced from her born-again Christian upbringing, would have been aware of the significance of this imagery and its layered meaning. She recalls partaking in 'the full spirit-filled born-again lunacy'³⁰ of such years. Some of this intensely-felt 'lunacy' has survived deep in the layered text of *Blasted* with its wild questionings and rapid slippages from agnostic denial to rhapsodic epiphany, emerging from what Dan Rebellato called 'the irreducible core' of the play.³¹ The scene climaxes in oblique but intense references to Christianity which present as a provocation rather than parody: 'expressing a sense of the other' (the Absolute) in Waaijman's religious terminology.³²

Critics have managed to recognize a profound uplifting humanity in these last moments. For Ken Urban, *Blasted* 'ends with a moment of ethical possibility. Kane leaves us with an image of good (though not of the Good) which emerges out of such

²⁸ *Blasted*, 5, p.61.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.61.

³⁰ 'The Element that Most Outrages: Morality, Censorship and Sarah Kane's *Blasted*' Aleks Sierz, *European Studies* 17 (2001), pp. 225-239.

³¹ Rebellato, p. 280. The irreducible core in the text, for Rebellato, is love.

³² Waaijman, p, 1. As a Catholic theologian, Waaijman is inclined to call the 'other' the Absolute.

devastation'.³³ Urban recognises that, in feeding Ian 'sausage and gin', Cate's action is, 'in performance. a gesture of unimaginable generosity'.³⁴ The gesture of generosity is even more unimaginable, I would argue, because it takes place after Ian has died which places it dramatically in the realm of the transcendent. The unimaginable is encapsulated in the final two words 'Thank you.' Helen Iball, in agreeing with Urban's view that the final words 'Thank you' do 'not imply a moment of moral redemption'³⁵, argues that the words are there (simply) to 'foster a respect for the dignity of each person that acknowledges global diversity in cultures and beliefs'.³⁶ However the gradual pyramid-like evolution of modes of spirituality in the play freights the closing words with an intense hybridity, in Benjamin's sense of a 'constellation', combining the non-religious autonomous and the Christian-religious, which far surpasses, in dramatic terms, 'a respect for the dignity of each person', but transfigures it. The imagery in the final stage direction *It rains*, placed after the silence before Ian's final words, enriches the image further by adding a referent layer of baptismal cleansing.³⁷

Without introducing the concept of spirituality, Twomey argues that degrees of hope can be found in the 'fragmentary narratives of other lives' which Cate refers to, setting in relief her character and that of Ian and the Soldier, by showing 'alternative possibilities somehow inaccessible to them'.³⁸ Comparing this technique with Beckett, Twomey hints that these other stories create a sort of 'liberating potential in the otherwise existentially closed world of their plays'.³⁹ It is true that by referencing these other characters e.g. her mother, father, boyfriend, brother, Cate's and Ian's radius of affectivity is broadened but this does not account for or acknowledge the intermittent fractured and fraught in-text spirituality—'gasps of spirituality' in Aleks Sierz's phrase,⁴⁰ referring to a similar dramaturgical technique in *4.48 Psychosis*—which inhabits *Blasted* from Ian's 'You know I love you'⁴¹ to the final transformative 'Thank you'.⁴² The same forward, though more intermittent and agonised, spiritual movement will be traced in

³³ Urban, p.46.

³⁴ Ibid., p.46.

³⁵ Ibid., p.46.

³⁶ Helen Iball, *Sarah Kane's 'Blasted'* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 48.

³⁷ *Blasted*, 5, p.61.

³⁸ Twomey, p.118,

³⁹ Ibid., p.119.

⁴⁰ Aleks Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011), p. 196.

⁴¹ *Blasted*, 1, p.5.

⁴² *Blasted*, 5, p.61

4.48 *Psychosis* with its acme of spiritual yearning in the final line 'Please open the curtains.'⁴³

Possibly Twomey's inflexibly doctrinal protestant Christian viewpoint refuses to let him see what is happening in the actual stratas of the text⁴⁴ and, at times, it seems as if he is trying to have it both ways i.e. transferring any capacity for transcendence to the invocation of external characters yet allowing Cate a capacity for 'creating a prayerful narrative of hopeful alternatives'.⁴⁵ This comes in at the end of the play, after 'the sound of heavy winter rain':

Cate is burying the baby under the floor.

She looks round and finds two pieces of wood.

*She rips the lining out of Ian's jacket and binds the wood together in a cross which she sticks into the floor. She collects a few of the scattered flowers and places them under the cross*⁴⁶

The act of finding two pieces of wood and fashioning them into a cross is reminiscent of the benign imagery of Len's chair-building at the end of *Saved*, similarly life-affirming 'practical spirituality' and performed in silence.⁴⁷ The addition of the life-affirming Eros-oriented images of scattered flowers create a momentary frame for the expression of Cate's heightened Christian-religious spirituality, soon invaded by Ian's erratic and despairing spiritual questioning – 'Can bury me next to her soon; Will you pray for me? [...] Can't you forgive me?' until he is reduced to a nightmarish succession of short scenes of masturbation, strangling, shitting, laughing hysterically, then crying.⁴⁸

Modes of spirituality in Scene Five operate in potent combination, enabled by the imagistic or cataphatic (images of cross, bread, gin) and primordial apophatic imagery of alternating light and darkness, metaphorical of Cate and Ian's turbulent spiritual journey throughout the play, which punctuates these various actions and spiritually hybrid activities (prayer communion, Ian's 'Thank you'). There are clear, if bleak, references to

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.61.

⁴⁴ Twomey, p. 111: 'I should state at the outset that my interpretation of the hopefulness of a play like *Blasted* may at times go beyond Kane's own, for Kane was able to see *Blasted* as hopeful at least in part 'because the characters continue to scrape a life out of the ruins' despite the fact that the life remaining to them is barely a life at all'.

⁴⁵ Twomey, p. 121.

⁴⁶ *Blasted*, 5, p. 58.

⁴⁷ Practical spirituality as described by Melanie Rogers, Advanced Nurse Practitioner at the University of Huddersfield, quoted in the previous chapter.

⁴⁸ *Blasted*, 5, pp. 59-60.

the last supper of Christ conflated with the image of Michaelangelo's *Pieta* as Cate 'pulls a sheet off the bed and wraps it round her' and 'sits next to Ian's head.'⁴⁹

Such constellations are complex. Unless the patterning stratas of the text are taken into consideration the intermittent emergence and evolving lacunae of various forms of spirituality will go unrecognised. Far from being inaccessible, 'alternative possibilities' are forever being characterised by Kane in the behaviour of Cate and Ian, not simply in projections on to other off-stage characters. This constitutes the variegated and continually surprising nature of spirituality in the text.

Minimal Appearance and Oblique Manifestation

Points of emergence in the text, facilitating the vibrant area of 'minimal appearance' of this spirituality of abjection are as follows: the passage beginning with the erotic spirituality of Ian's 'You know I love you'; the negative thanotic spirituality underpinning the dialogue about bombing and shooting; Ian's expression of and longing for the transcendent experience of love—'You take me to another place'—and Cate's empathic response; Ian's pleading with Cate to 'make him happy'; followed by an oblique manifestation of spirituality in the stage directions – 'He sees the bouquet of flowers and picks it up [...] The sound of spring rain'; the oblique manifestation of spirituality through the *body* in Cate's kissing and touching Ian until Ian ejaculates on uttering the word 'killer'.⁵⁰ All show moments of emergence in the relationship between Cate and Ian where there is a gradual awakening of love and awareness, however challenged by circumstance.

After this Kane gives brief expository information about the societal crisis outside. Ian and Cate's well-being is clearly in a mode of suffering –

Cate: How you feeling?

Ian: I ache.⁵¹

After which Kane, for the first time in the play, clarifies, with understated irony, the situation for the audience:

Cate: Looks like there's a war on.⁵²

The war is clearly as much internalized in the behaviour of the characters as it is externalized in what is happening beyond the room. There is the momentary chance of

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁵⁰ *Blasted*, 2, p.31.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁵² Ibid., p. 33.

renewal and cleansing in Cate's 'I'm having a bath and going home'.⁵³ But the Soldier enters after much ominous knocking. With the entry of the Soldier, brutalised and traumatized, the spiritually thanotic reaches a generally heightened condition in one small moment, all spirituality until then having been submerged. At first, the Soldier reveals an obscure neediness and 'reaches out to touch Ian's face but stops short of physical contact'.⁵⁴ Kane deftly indicates a moment of spiritual longing before the deflating

Ian You taking the piss?

Soldier Me?

(*He smiles.*)

Our town now.⁵⁵

The explosion which then blasts a hole in the hotel room is paradigmatic of the human values which have been already been partially destroyed. In itself it is as dominant image but not necessarily a spiritual one.

It is unsurprising that with such minimal appearances of modes of spirituality in the dialogue, spirituality itself moves into a default position and manifests itself in the stage directions in the vibrant area of oblique manifestation. At first, in the Thanatos-oriented, almost supernatural effect of knocking,⁵⁶ the aftermath of which recalls Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* in the way objects, e.g. a tray of sandwiches, are left outside the door but no one is present.⁵⁷ Later, there are moments of repressed, negative spirituality symbolized sexually in Ian's desperate masturbation at Cate's rejection of him:

Ian Don't worry. Can we make love tonight?

Cate No.

Ian Why not?

Cate I'm not your girlfriend anymore.⁵⁸

Scene Four is a kind of reconciliatory coda as Cate returns soaking wet and carrying a baby, telling Ian 'The soldiers have taken over'. With the introduction of the baby, Kane suggests the hopefulness of innocence and vulnerability before reversing

⁵³ Ibid., p.35.

⁵⁴ *Blasted*, 3, p.38

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵⁶ Shakespeare uses a similar malign effect in *Macbeth*, Act, Scene, ratcheting up tension and expectation before the comic interlude of the Porter.

⁵⁷ Harold Pinter, *The Dumb Waiter* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

⁵⁸ *Blasted*, 1, p. 15.

audience expectations. Ian asking for his gun and Cate removing the bullets is a subtle way of segueing into the passage challenging belief in the supernatural and a deity.

Ian No God. No Father Christmas. No fairies, No Narnia. No fucking nothing.⁵⁹

The next few exchanges are less a refutation of belief, more an appeal to the audience to reconsider the possibilities of belief in such dire circumstances, a spirituality of questioning. Cate's simple 'I believe in God' is a statement of uncompromising courage in the setting.⁶⁰ Ian's counter argument 'Everything's got a scientific explanation' neatly encapsulates late twentieth century agnosticism.⁶¹ The stage direction 'The sound of heavy winter rain' which ends Scene Four suggests metaphorical healing and cleansing.⁶² Throughout the text there are relentlessly small obscure moments contradicting the overall negative tone of the dramaturgy.

The spatial gaps between the stage directions suggest this end-sequence be played with a sense of ritual and reverence. The actors, Marin Ireland who played Cate and Reed Birney who played Ian in the New York production of 2008, as Peter Zazzali observes, were praised for their sensitive handling of the scene: Ireland's 'Cate made the choice to care for Ian, who responded with a mixture of gratitude and remorse.'⁶³ Spiritual conversion, of a sort, happens in these final moments.

The autonomously non-religious spiritual, obliquely and minimally expressed intermittently throughout the playtext transforms here into the putatively Christian-religious mode just as Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* saves the Christian-religious expression of the Chorus until the closing moments. These are conscious dramaturgical choices within the text to create layered theatrical impact.

A thread of submerged spirituality running through the play emerges in cumulative and incremental manner until the transformative climax with its nuanced religiosity.

Patterning

Formally very different, both *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis* position various kinds of spirituality in the text with careful dramaturgical patterning. As with Bond, there is an element of suppression and submersion. A negative tone persists in both scenarios, the

⁵⁹ *Blasted*, 4, p.55.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.56.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.57.

⁶³ Peter Zazzali, 'The Brutality of Redemption', PAJ 91, *A Journal of Performance and Art*, 31. 1, January 2009, p. 127.

one, *Blasted*, ostensibly naturalistic until literally blown apart in Scene Three; the other, 4.48 *Psychosis*, seemingly scatter-shot in style, mimicking the process of a mind suffering *in extremis*. To account for the seemingly random emergence of spirituality in these texts, I identify the facilitating techniques of ‘minimal appearance’ and ‘oblique manifestation’. How these function, in their close alliance with dramaturgical patterning, is shown in the analysis of both scripts.

As with Eliot and Fry, patterning takes the form of juxtaposition, tonal contrasts and sudden expression of need which allow particular moments of spirituality to have maximum dramatic impact. I found this to be the case in both my practice plays: the creative impulse sought to impose patterns which would enable the dramatic meaning of the plays to come through. In *The Ruth Ellis Show* it was the juxtapositioning of the trial with Ruth’s recalled life which enabled these moments of spiritual emergence; in *Servants*, it was combination of compacted time in the creation of the meal set against Virginia and Mille’s disparate longings which facilitated spiritual emergence. Throughout *Blasted*, the visceral and the negative are juxtaposed with the tender and the heartfelt. I identify eleven binaural moments which map this evolving pattern of awareness much like a spiritual rollercoaster.

Beginning with seven low-key, subtle passages in Scene One, the first when Ian having lured Cate to the hotel and established that he’s carrying a gun, and, after a demeaning discussion about her brother, suddenly looks at Cate and says ‘I love you’, Cate ‘smiles a big smile, friendly and non-sexual’.⁶⁴ This brief moment of non-erotic autonomous spirituality of care establishes an empathic bond and is repeated in various permutations until the end. By repetition, Kane implies that this form of love is enduring. Ian replies ‘Don’t want you ever to leave.’⁶⁵

Second, in Scene One, Cate has a fit, sending her into Twomey’s world of ‘alternative possibilities’.⁶⁶ The world of war is not the only world. To point this up, Kane has Ian exclaim ‘Fucking Jesus’ and, later, when she comes round, ‘What the Christ was that?’⁶⁷ Subtly, Kane introduces the parallel narrative of evolving, if challenged, autonomous spirituality although signalling a religious nuance. This parallel world indicates the layeredness of the dramaturgy explored below in the section on stratification.

⁶⁴ *Blasted*, 1, p.5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁶⁶ Twomey, p.116.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Third, as if not to sentimentalise this burgeoning spiritual evolution, Kane introduces two sequences of autonomous spirituality in a Thanatos-oriented register, suggesting that events have taken their toll on Ian. In the first, later, in Scene One, Ian's expression of love is exploitative, dominating after his exclamation 'I am not well anymore'.⁶⁸ His kissing, 'putting his hand under her top and moving it towards her breast' is less an expression of erotic longing than a bodily assault under the excuse of love.⁶⁹ Cate is troubled by this and stammers out 'Ian, d -don't.' After masturbating, undoing his trousers, despite her stammering protests, Cate starts to 'tremble and make inarticulate crying sounds'.⁷⁰ Within the malign opportunism of Ian, indicative of autonomous spirituality, as noted by Matthew Fox, with its rootedness in the body, the benign image of tortured inchoate spirituality recalls the baby's cry in *Saved*.⁷¹ Unlike the youths in Bond's play, Ian relents, saying, 'All right Cate, it's all right. We don't have to do anything.'⁷² In this reply, Kane suggests a moral centre for Ian, however skewed.

Fourth, this sequence segues into a second thanotic episode where Ian, apparently in pain, uses Cate's hand, against her will, to masturbate himself, then alternately lambasts her with accusations of infidelity while using racist expressions about the hotel staff. In the midst of this he apologizes: 'Sorry. Pressure, pressure. I love you, that's all.' To which Cate replies 'You were horrible to me.'⁷³ This is followed by

fifth, Ian's apparently benign expression of love: 'Cate love, I'm trying to look after you. Stop you getting hurt', a declaration that switches his mood to a caring mode of spirituality.⁷⁴ Ian's essential spiritual complexity is carefully mapped throughout.

Sixth, in Scene One, after a lengthy discussion on whether either could shoot anyone, Ian's sudden avowal 'When I'm with you I can't think of anyone else. You take me to another place' does not simply refer back to the surreal discussion they have just had, but evokes the stratified worlds of experience they are both living in and the capacity for transformation.⁷⁵ In Kristevan terms, as is probable in a dystopian drama, two destabilised subjects, Ian and Cate, 'constantly search for stabilisation'.⁷⁶ Both share a moment of benign understanding which deepens into an appreciation of the

⁶⁸ *Blasted*, 1, p.14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷¹ Matthew Fox, *Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 1.

⁷² *Blasted*, 1, p.14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁷⁵ *Blasted*, 1, p.22.

⁷⁶ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love*, p.19.

liminal and the transcendent in a labile skittish dialogue that develops as if the characters do not fully realize the import of their thoughts:

Cate The world don't exist, not like this,
Looks the same but –
Time slows down.
A dream I get stuck in, can't do nothing about it.
One time –
Ian Make love to me.⁷⁷

Seventh, both Cate and Ian reach towards an imaginative understanding of their being in the world while the forces of war are continually trying to negate it.

Cate and Ian's autonomous non-religious instinctive spiritualities barely rise above the embryonic level so that when flashes do occur the spiritualities easily submerge under the visceralities of the plot. Yet the continual surfacing creates a pathetic tension as in the final hybrid sequence in Scene One:

Ian Don't know nothing. That's why I love you, want to make love to you.
Cate But you can't.
Ian Why not?
Cate I don't want to.
Ian Why did you come here?
Cate You sounded unhappy.
Ian Make me happy.⁷⁸

The sequence ends with Ian protesting 'I love you' with Cate rejoicing 'I don't love you' as Ian picks up a bouquet of flowers and says 'These are for you'.⁷⁹ The image of flowers can be seen as projected images of embryonic spiritual growth. This infantile gesture is followed by 'The sound of spring rain', again suggesting the promise of early fertilisation and perhaps renewal. The effusive imagery of rain and flowers suggest incursions of autonomous spirituality in an erotic caring register, reminiscent of James Hillman's sense of spirituality's urge towards transforming ultimates and by the way of

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.22.

⁷⁸ *Blasted*, 1, p. 23.

⁷⁹ *Blasted*, 1, p.24.

the via negativa.⁸⁰ I do not see this stage direction as at all parodic or cynical but a deeply-felt dramatic counterpoint to the negativity so far displayed. Placed here, it recalls Eliot's line from *The Waste Land*: 'stirring / Dull roots with spring rain'.⁸¹ As an enthusiast of Eliot's work, as Kane revealed in an interview with Dan Rebellato, the use of such imagery is allusive.⁸²

Autonomous spiritualities in *Blasted* remain at the level of labile adolescence, understood by Kristeva to be 'part and parcel of the speaking subject' engaged in a genuine searching for a faith stance in order to achieve psychic balance.⁸³ As a former Christian, Kane's creative unconscious would have been open to such a configuration. When the

eighth moment in the sequence occurs, in Scene Two, when Ian asks 'How are you feeling?' and Cate replies 'I ache', the ache is freighted with all the emotive and ontological baggage we have observed up to that point.⁸⁴

Autonomous spirituality appears entirely submerged and repressed with the appearance of the traumatised soldier, Kane showing how war can destroy or repress even the vestiges of an original spiritual impulse. As Yeats put it: 'Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart'.⁸⁵ However, in *Blasted*, spirituality proves remarkably resilient, overriding the between-scenes mortar blast and the horrific personal narrative and actions of the Soldier in Scene Three until Scene Four, when

Ninth, after the suicide of the soldier, Ian's neediness reasserts itself. In Scene Four, Ian says 'I need you to stay Cate. Won't be for long.'⁸⁶ And a little later, 'Help me'.⁸⁷ Again, expressing an erotic spirituality of care, Ian reaches out to Cate to help him transcend his physical suffering. Tenth, the debate about God's existence, in Scene Four, is indicative of the basic questioning of Kristeva's adolescent search for ideality, but also widens the audience's perspective on the narrative, deepening the philosophical

⁸⁰ James Hillman, *The Essential James Hillman: a Blue Fire*, ed. by Thomas More (London: Routledge, 1990), p.122.

⁸¹ T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T S Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982 [1969]), p. 61.

⁸² Dan Rebellato, *Interview with Sarah Kane*, Kane included 'Hurry up please, it's time' from Eliot's *The Waste Land* in *Crave*. Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen Drama, 2001), p.162.

⁸³ Julia Kristeva, *The Incredible Need to Believe*, p.12.

⁸⁴ *Blasted*, 2, p.33.

⁸⁵ W.B. Yeats, 'Easter 1916', in *Yeats: Selected Poetry*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan and Co, Ltd, 1964), p. 95.

⁸⁶ *Blasted*, 4, p.52.

⁸⁷ *Blasted*, 4, p. 53.

quest. Eleventh, thematically, the sequence in Scene Five, where Cate makes a cross and buries the baby is expressive of the stark simplicity of her faith, accompanied by random praying, and leads in to the simple but affective elicitation of Ian's eucharistic 'Thank you'.⁸⁸ Because both characters are seen to be living *in extremis*, the words move beyond parody.

Although the text is sequenced, there are constant elements of slippage and overlapping of all vibrant areas in the text of *Blasted*: no dramatist writes by numbers or expresses herself mechanically in easily identifiable categories. For example, imagery can be found within patterning; within patterning can be found examples of stratification i.e. the more profound concerns of the characters expressed with heartfelt emotion. As above, I try to pin-point where in the text these areas are, and indicate how many, and what the facilitating strategies are which operate in them—as I have discovered originally in the practice plays, and then in the work of Eliot, Fry, Bond, Shaffer and Churchill. Operating in her world of extremes, Kane's positioned spirituality, shown mainly in non-religious autonomous and hybrid modes, makes itself known in the traditional modes of hope, courage, struggle, righteous anger, care and joy as well as in less-than-obvious Thanatos-oriented register, frustration and deflecting imagery.

Stratification

Kane deploys spiritual development in text as the work of a highly-conscious artist (in contrast to the work of Bond and Shaffer, in which a primitive spirituality, often in negative, thanotic register, gets in through the back door, so to speak, through character via the unconscious dramaturgy of the creative mind). *Blasted* is predicated on a repressed underlying spiritual substratum which emerges in and throughout the text. The seemingly random is the product of sharp, deliberate, highly conscious, artistic patterning strategies. In addition to the pattern of development noted above, there are four points of stratification emerging in the text, each developing organically from the other, carefully positioned for maximum theatrical impact to enhance, underscore and amplify the preceding drama.

'Fucking Jesus' and 'What the Christ was that?'⁸⁹ introduce, as the first point of emergence, surreptitiously, a Christian reference early in the script so that Kane can then—slily using these terms as a springboard—introduce a sustained reflection on death after Cate awakes from her fit:

⁸⁸ *Blasted*, 5, p. 61.

⁸⁹ *Blasted*, 1, p.9.

Ian Thought you were dead.

Cate [I] suppose that's what it's like.

Ian Don't do it again, fucking scared me.

Cate: Don't know much about it, I just go. Feels like I'm away for minutes or months sometimes, then I come back just where I was.

Ian It's terrible.

Cate I didn't go far.

Ian What if you didn't come round?

Cate Would know I'd stay there.

Ian Can't stand it.

He goes to the mini bar and pours himself another large gin and lights a cigarette.

Cate What?

Ian Death. Not being.

Cate You fall asleep and then you wake up.

Ian How do you know?

Cate Why don't you give up smoking?

Ian *(Laughs.)*⁹⁰

The philosophical concerns are dismissed with a laugh: a dramaturgical ploy to suggest the randomness and inconsequence of the conversation. But this stratum of spiritual anxiety is carefully positioned to problematize and add layers of meaning to the unfolding dramatic narrative.

The underlying stratum of spiritual concern is positioned again, in a second, richer point of emergence after Cate has had her fit, evoking an instinctive dimension of deeper philosophical awareness in both characters:

Cate The world don't exist, not like this.

Looks the same but -

Time slows down.

A dream I get stuck in, can't do nothing about it.

One time

⁹⁰ *Blasted*, 1, p.10.

Ian Make love to me.

Cate Blocks out everything else.

Ian Make love to you.

Cate It's like that when I touch myself.

Ian *is embarrassed.*

Cate Just before I'm wondering what it'll be like, and just after I'm thinking about the next one, but just as it happens, it's lovely, I don't think of nothing else.

Ian Like the first cigarette of the day.⁹¹

Kane is subtly hinting here that there are other dimensions of experience blasted out of consciousness and affectivity by violence, rape and torture so that autonomous spirituality itself is repressed. In these circumstances, Cate's self-masturbation may fulfil a compensatory transcendent function. There is a degree of élan here, as in Fry. But, characteristically perhaps as well as dramaturgically, she deflates the discussion with a jibe—'Like the first cigarette of the day'—to a) minimize the seriousness for a perhaps slightly baffled audience and b) to explode and complicate a sense of normality by adding to the extremity of violence the further extremity of spirituality.⁹² That this substratum is potent for both characters accounts for Cate's stammering fits and Ian's random reflections as they try to make sense of their predicament. In the Rift theatre production of 2017 Nigel Barrett as Ian and Verity Kirk as Cate seemed to float into the air during this sequence, so ethereally was it acted and directed.⁹³

Hitherto submerged, searching spirituality minimally surfaces again, in a third, even richer point of emergence, after the soldier has 'blown his brains out' in Scene Four:

Cate It's wrong to kill yourself.

Ian No it's not.

Cate God wouldn't like it.

Ian There isn't one.

Cate How do you know?

⁹¹ *Blasted*, 1, pp. 22-23.

⁹² *Ibid*, p.23.

⁹³ *Blasted*, directed by Ali Pidsley for Rift Productions at the Styx Theatre, Tottenham Hale, 3-11 March 2017. The production was highly praised by Aleks Sierz, among other critics.

Ian No God. No Father Christmas. No fairies. No Narnia. No fucking nothing.

Cate Got to be something.

Ian Why?

Cate Doesn't make sense otherwise.⁹⁴

until:

Ian Can't die and come back.

Cate I believe in God.

Ian Everything's got a scientific explanation.⁹⁵

and then:

Ian What you doing?

Cate Praying. Just in case.⁹⁶

The continued juvenile anxiously spiritual/religious debate, characterising Kristeva's search for stabilisation—'All of us are adolescents when we are passionate about the absolute'⁹⁷—reaches its apotheosis when Ian seemingly comes back from the dead, having died:

He eats the baby.

He puts the remains back in the baby's blanket and puts the bundle back in the hole.

A beat, then he climbs in after it and lies down, head poking out if the floor.

He dies with relief.

It starts to rain on him, coming through the roof.

Eventually.

Ian Shit.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ *Blasted*, 4, pp. 54-55.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.56.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.58.

⁹⁷ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p.14.

⁹⁸ *Blasted*, 5, p.60. In the Rift production Ian bit into a shawl-wrapped bulging transparent plastic bag of water. The resulting explosion of water spectacularly evoked multiple layered meanings of cleansing, destruction, transformation, baptism and quenching of thirst. It was, as Aleks Sierz said, 'memorable'. Aleks Sierz, *My Theatre Mates*, review of *Blasted*, 4 March 2017. <http://mytheatremates.com/blasted-styx/> [accessed 5 March 2017]

Kane, in this fourth and final point of emergence, subverts in a final corollary of ironic dramatic action, all of Ian's arguments about death, by having him experience not only a baptism and but also a resurrection. The exclamation 'shit' is an unlikely affirmation of faith in dire and dystopian circumstances. Far from being the nihilistic play that many perceive, *Blasted* is a provocation to believe, religion not being 'merely an illusion and source of neurosis', according to Kristeva.⁹⁹ Indeed from a Kristevan perspective these points of emergence dramatize an unsteady move towards ideality, the 'incredible need to believe'.

These four points of emergence, each developing organically from the other, amount to a play with-in a play, reinforcing the development enumerated above and mapping the deeper ontological concerns of the dramatist and contrast with the vivid evocation of visceral horrors in the main plot. A gendered spirituality is not entirely suppressed in order to foreground more oppressive contingent realities.

4.48 Psychosis: 'Remember the light and believe the light' ¹⁰⁰

Originally viewed as 'a suicide note', *4.48 Psychosis* was written by Sarah Kane in 1998 during a period of great psychological suffering.¹⁰¹ Depressive illness notwithstanding, the play remains less a suicide note than a sublimely achieved work of art, relentless in its determined artistry. Complexly layered, the play shows as much daring and exuberance in dramatic language as Eliot or Fry. There are no named character parts, no division into separate named scenes, and the entire script resembles on the page an extended dialogue for multiple voices in a ruptured free versification: a fragmented self, dialoguing with itself in a tortuous and tortured argument to find reasons for staying alive. There are echoes of Beckett's 'I can't go on. I'll go on' in its relentless wavering between despair and hope.¹⁰² *4.48 Psychosis* is a play in multiple voices characterizing the ontological and psychic agony of a mind shutting down as a result of

⁹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*, p.83.

¹⁰⁰ *4.48 Psychosis* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, [2000] 2002), p.4.

¹⁰¹ 'Suicide note' was a phrase used by Michael Billington and several other critics in their original reviews of *4.48 Psychosis*. 'How do you judge a 75 minute suicide note?', Theatre, *The Guardian*, 30 June 2000.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2000/jun/30/theatre.artsfeatures>> [accessed 20.6.2020]

¹⁰² Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable* ed. by Steven Connor (London: Faber and Faber [1955] 2010), p.134.

profound unassuageable trauma exacerbated by state-sanctioned psychiatric care. The poetic language and alternating silences convey a subtextual potency which draws the audience in and renders it more a play than a dramatic poem. Ultimately moving and engaging, it dramatizes heroic internal conflicting dialogues and psychic hiatuses to remain alive and well despite the overpowering and contrary destructive forces of despair and confusion.

For all its volcanic anger and despair, *4.48 Psychosis* is a curiously engaging piece, as if the author is dramatizing *in extremis* all the liminal anxieties, layered fears and crazy irrational madnnesses of its audience so that the human being watching and listening (or silently reading) may understand something of the darkness of life and the spiritual light she implies was never out of reach.

Most of the voices can be understood to operate at Kristeva's adolescent level of the spiritual with its dependence on surreal imagery and symbol to articulate the 'catastrophic anguish ('passion') of depressive psychosis'.¹⁰³ Such a model of anguished spirituality corresponds well to the fragmented turmoil of the protagonist's search for meaning. Exactly this is seen in the opening litany of statements on pages 4 to 6, after a list of narcissistic statement 'I am fat'—'I cannot write'—'I cannot love':

At 4.48

when desperation visits

I shall hang myself

To the sound of my lover's breathing.

I do not want to die

I have become so depressed by the fact of my mortality that I have decided to commit suicide.¹⁰⁴

Dominic Cavendish, in his review of the Young Vic production of 2009, refers indeed to the 'tortuous adolescent abstraction' in the writing yet recognises its 'lacerating' power.¹⁰⁵ This constitutes a link with *Blasted*: the ongoing fixation with the piecemeal expression of embryonic spiritualities in visceral, dystopian settings.

¹⁰³ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁰⁴ *4.48 Psychosis*, p.5.

¹⁰⁵ Dominic Cavendish, '4.48 Psychosis at the Young Vic', *The Telegraph*, Theatre <<https://telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre/theatre-reviews/5926013/4.48-Pychosis-at-the-Young-Vic-review.html>> [accessed January 20, 2017]

Vibrant areas in *4.48 Psychosis* reveal how Kane's dramatic economy is particularly directed as to how spirituality is to emerge in text. The spiritual leaches through the text via language and stage directions. For Kane, this leaching-through-text is a highly-conscious artistic choice and theatrical manoeuvre, presenting as beats in a musical composition. Four vibrant areas remain in common with those used in *Blasted*: imagery, patterning, minimal appearance, and obscure manifestation. Silence becomes very much a musical device of rests and accidentals pointing up a confused, agonised, autonomous personal spirituality of stultification, despair, terror and unknowing.

Vibrant Areas: Patterning

Yet within these parameters, as in *Blasted*, an evolving pattern of ontological quest (and maybe crazed theological quest) is happening in the text, fighting the relentless onslaught of negation and destructiveness, talking over the abyss:

Remember the light and believe the light
An instant of clarity before eternal night
don't let me forget¹⁰⁶

This evolving pattern of quest recalls Grotowski's belief that theatre as 'a place of provocation' [...] 'allows us to transcend our stereotyped vision [...] and through shock, through the shudder which causes us to drop our daily masks and mannerisms – we are able, without hiding anything, to entrust ourselves to something we cannot name but in which live Eros and Caritas.'¹⁰⁷ As audience, as readers, we share Kane's precarious journey and entrust ourselves to the encounter with what cannot be named, an ideality which suggests Kane is groping (heroically) towards a saving non-religious spirituality, or at least operating within this circumference. The recurrence of religious references and debate also suggests, after a moving away from the religious, a final encampment within a hybrid form of autonomous Christian-religious spirituality.

A searching surrealism is established from the outset with manic reasoning voices now positive, now negative. 'I had a night in which everything was revealed to me. / How can I speak again? / The broken hermaphrodite who trusted herself alone finds the room in reality teeming and begs never to wake from the nightmare' gives way to the prosaic 'I have resigned myself to death this year. [...] This is becoming my normality'.¹⁰⁸ There

¹⁰⁶ *4.48 Psychosis*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2002 [1968]), pp.256-267.

¹⁰⁸ *4.48 Psychosis*, p.6.

are frequent slippages like this into adolescent abhorrence: 'I have reached the end of this dreary and repugnant tale of a sense interned in an alien carcass and lumpen by the malignant spirit of the moral majority'.¹⁰⁹ The malignant spirit pervades the play, alternating with minimal expressions of a saving autonomous spirituality in an Eros-oriented register. Through these minimal expressions of broken-ness 'the light gets in', as Leonard Cohen puts it.¹¹⁰

4.48 Psychosis, like *Blasted*, establishes the negative tone from the beginning and fragments in form, intermittently challenging notions of belief and redemption from then on although there is no half-way intervention as there is in the earlier play. Thanotic spirituality, unlike the interiorized malignity of Alan Strang in *Equus*, populates the text as if from outside, infecting the play in random sequences. The speaker is aware of this from the outset, blaming poisoning by society:

I have reached the end of this dreary and repugnant tale of a sense interned
in an alien carcass and lumpen by the malignant spirit of the moral
majority¹¹¹

This infection and poisoning, she implies, is what causes her to 'sing without hope on the boundary'.¹¹²

Like *Blasted*, spirituality emerges overall in incremental fits and starts, as part of the process of challenge and abjection, but this time through patterning limited to dramatic language. Unlike *Blasted*, the play seems predicated on despair with intermittent bursts of autonomous embryonic spirituality in its dramaturgy, following an imaging patterning of light/dark, a feature of the forward movement's textual dynamics. *4.48 Psychosis* (to borrow Donoghue's not entirely pejorative phrase for describing the work of Fry) is not merely 'a theatre of words' but distinctly a theatre of silences.¹¹³

The movement outwards in *4.48 Psychosis* is signalled from the outset, after 'a very long silence', by the outward-looking line 'But you have friends'.¹¹⁴ The opening pause is pregnant, gestating the dense, packed, furious, binaural, agonized text which follows. The positive terms begin with friends, lot, supportive, offer, consciousness, light.... The forward and outward-looking momentum of the text, which is itself heroic—

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.12.

¹¹⁰ Leonard Cohen, *Anthem*, Album 10, *The Future*, November 1992.

¹¹¹ *4.48 Psychosis*, p.12.

¹¹² Ibid., p.12.

¹¹³ Denis Donoghue, 'Christopher Fry's Theatre of Words' in *The Third Voice: Modern British and American Verse Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp.750-792.

¹¹⁴ *4.48 Psychosis*, p. 3.

the heroism of the creative artist determined to express an ineffable internal conflict—is urged along through the unfolding drama by occasional, well-placed lines like ‘Have you made any plans?’;¹¹⁵ by the traumatised ‘I need to become who I already am and will bellow forever at this incongruity which has committed me to hell’;¹¹⁶ by the calm lyrical beauty of ‘I sing without hope on the boundary’;¹¹⁷ until the final outward-looking heart-felt request of ‘Please open the curtains.’¹¹⁸ which ends the play. Periodic, strategically-placed lines like these urge the play forward, away from abjection towards repetitive, fleeting and pained spiritual transcendences. Dramaturgically these aspects of patterning are difficult to measure since the lines are open to directorial interpretation and, in private reading, to the sensibility of the reader. Yet an under-pattern emerges of an incremental yearning towards a transcendence of personal release and redemption.

These small moments of transcendence are deeply affecting. I disagree with Zabrodzka, Cermak and Chrz’s view that the play ‘is a sign of how the creative, regressive process in connection with depression, stops serving the ego and fatally turns against herself.’¹¹⁹ On the contrary, even if the play were taken as an enacted process of suicidal regression, within its contrapuntal rhythms, the play presents on stage as a glorious heartfelt, harrowing choral song and the pauses and silences like rests in musical notation. Despite their view, Zabrodzka, Cermak and Chrz find enough hopefulness in the play to discount it as a suicide note.¹²⁰

Imagery

The final words ‘Please open the curtains’ function in a similar way to the final words in *Blasted*.¹²¹ They are a cumulative moment, constellating and bringing together many of the modes of spirituality shown in the play. The imagery of curtains extends some of the darker images earlier in the play but without the negativity: the curtains have to be opened, suggesting a transformative aspect. The voice uttering them is reaching towards the light, towards a wanted revelation. In the original performance, at the Royal Court, the windows were opened and light, fresh air and the sounds of traffic flooded in. James MacDonald the director, concurred with Aleks Sierz that the ending was transcendent,

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.10.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.12.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.p.43.

¹¹⁹ Katerina Zabrodzka, Ivo Cermak, Vladimir Chrz, ‘4.48 Psychosis as a suicide note of Sarah Kane?’ in *Narrative and Memory* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press, 2007), pp.111-119 (p. 114).

¹²⁰ Psychologists Zabrodzka, Cermak and Chrz find enough positive aspects in the writing to conclude that ‘the play was not a suicide note’. p.118.

¹²¹ *4.48 Psychosis*, p.43.

'religious'.¹²² This view makes sense if the final sequence is understood as signifying a burgeoning (or reaffirming) Christian-religious spirituality, 'touching the core of our human existence: our relation to the Absolute'.¹²³ Waaijman's concept is useful here in recognising the spark of a mature religious impulse in the dramatic writing, challenging Kristeva's 'adolescent' bracketing.

As in *Blasted*, there are throughout alternate binary threads of negative and positive terms which present from the beginning. Only this time the negative terms outnumber, cumulatively, the positive. In their fraught relationships these terms operate as images even if not images in a developed sense as metaphor, more like the dark accidental notes in a piece of music. Kristeva's idea of the musicalisation of language divulging spiritual secrets is revealed in a series of spare musical phrases like a sequence from Janáček's *From The House of the Dead*.¹²⁴ Here a single word is freighted with an unusual potency, symbolically marking the protagonist's spiritual trajectory.

For example, after stating the positive 'But you have friends', after a very long opening gestating silence, the negative imagery kicks in with a loquacious 'a consolidated consciousness resides in a darkened banquet hall near the ceiling of a mind whose floor shifts as ten thousand cockroaches when a shaft of light enters...'¹²⁵ Here a negative single-word image 'cockroaches' is counterpointed before and after with a positive: 'friends' and 'light', suggesting underlying suffering. Such images of light repeatedly enter the script. A voice exclaims 'Remember the light and believe the light' as if the phrase were intended to be a safety rail to be held onto in the darkness of fragmentation where no real relationships can be sustained or nurtured.¹²⁶

As in *Blasted*, imagery channelling spirituality is often reduced to occasional expressive words or phrases and, more often, the individual word functions as a potent channelling image or action such as: song, flux, splash... These produce a cumulative effect: in the litany of lists on pages 31 to 33 individual words, contrasting with the negatives, erotic with thanotic, are freighted with spiritual longing: achieve, overcome, increase, defend, vindicate, free, defy, maintain, belong... offering constellations of light,

¹²² 'Director James MacDonald on Sarah Kane', *Theatre Voice*, 23 May 2008 <https://www.theatrevoice.com/audio/director-james-macdonald-kane> [accessed 20 August 2015]

¹²³ Waaijman, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Leoš Janáček, *From the House of the Dead*. A three-act opera premiered in 1930, based on Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel.

¹²⁵ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 3.

¹²⁶ 4.48. *Psychosis*, pp.4, 5; 26,27.

or, to make a painting analogy, they are those bright pointilliste daubs which enhance and lift the whole picture. Kane's refining and reducing of language meant that facets of dramatic language itself, individual words, function as images carrying powerful psychological and spiritual weight.

In this way non-religious autonomous thanotic spirituality presents itself in occasional bursts of self-negation such as the passage beginning

Breakdown

No if or buts.

I didn't say if or but I said no

and ending

drowning in a sea of logic

this monstrous state of palsy

still ill¹²⁷

on page 21. Similar passages are introduced by the repeated phrase 'Hatch opens / Stark light' on pages 28, 37 and 38. Logic presented here as a cold overwhelming force negating emotional truth, 'drowning in a sea of logic', paradoxically images Eric Varden's concept of evil itself being illogical.¹²⁸ Here the illogicality is the protagonist's drowning response to the logic of hospital and medical care around her.

The insidious emergence of negative, thanotic, autonomous spirituality in the text creates a tension with the occasional outbursts of erotic embryonic spirituality:

What am I like?

the child of negation

[...]

Despair propels me to suicide

Anguish for which doctors can find no cure

Nor care to understand

I hope you never understand

Because I like you¹²⁹

The definite article 'the' in 'the child of negation' denotes an embryonic spirituality turned in against itself, suffocating an often inchoate spiritual voice, which is none the less liked

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.21.

¹²⁸ Erik Varden, *The Shattering of Loneliness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 138-140.

¹²⁹ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p 37.

and valued. Even the thanotic negative outpourings have the rhapsodic expression of autonomous spirituality. Thanotic or death-oriented spirituality presents differently in this play than it does in *Saved* or *Equus*. It does not drive the action as it does in Bond or Shaffer's play but is a conscious strategic artistic intervention, applying a darker personal strand to the story, however painful.

Hopeful symbolic imagery of light-in-the-darkness is reinforced with a range of Christian allusions, both biblical and allegorical. The word love itself carries much spiritual pain and echoes Christ's last words on the cross:

'My love, my love why have you forsaken me?'

Similarly, the lines

'She is the couching place where I never shall lie

And there's no meaning in life in the light of my loss'¹³⁰

echo lines from St John of the Cross in which the lover laments the physical absence of the loved one:

'Within my flowering breast

Which only for himself entire I save'¹³¹

Like St John's speaker in *The Dark Night*, she is involved in a search: 'I go out in the morning and I start my search for you.'¹³² 'Couching place' is an image of salvation and rest for which her heart longs.¹³³ The speaker's sense of desolation after the rejection of her loved one is then expressed economically in a plea to the ineffable:

I can fill my space

Fill my time

But nothing can fill this void in my heart

The vital need for which I would die.'¹³⁴

The prayer-like gravity of these lines denotes a mashed-up hybrid spirituality of the autonomous and the Christian-religious emerging suddenly between expressions of despair, and echoed again, much later via 'the piecemeal crumple of my mind'¹³⁵ in 'as still as my heart when your voice is gone'.¹³⁶ The words 'find, free, fill, vital, need' further

¹³⁰ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 17.

¹³¹ *St John of the Cross, The Poems*, trans. by Roy Campbell (London: The Harvill Press, 1951), p. 27.

¹³² 4.48 *Psychosis*, p.12.

¹³³ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 17.

¹³⁴ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 17.

¹³⁵ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 23.

¹³⁶ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 37.

evoke a spirituality of longing and searching for meaning amid the maelstrom of devastating psychotic suffering. Negative terms continue with broken, nightmare, darkened, beetle, sad, bored, hopeless, punished, guilty.¹³⁷

The inchoate articulation of spiritual concerns is evoked most vividly in the image of an interior whistle which by-passes language:

A dismal whistle that is the cry of heartbreak around the hellish bowl at the ceiling of my mind.¹³⁸

This is not the first corresponding image in Kane's work to the baby's cry in *Saved* which has no hearer or listener. A non-verbal aural image contrasts with a visual image of light, an inchoate sound cutting through darkness, suggesting that trauma is experienced by more than one sense and invades the whole being. As in *Blasted*, sensitisation from trauma, affords the occasional narcissistic epiphany as an echo of this sense of inner mind in the penultimate:

It is myself I have never met, whose face is pasted on the underside of my mind.¹³⁹

Silence

Within the torrent of words there are, as well as the marked stage-directed silences, repeated vibrant areas of silence of varying lengths, between dialogic passages. This is clear from the way the written text is laid out on the page. There are sixty-two stage directed silences: forty-six 'ordinary' silences; thirteen 'long silences' and three 'very long silences'. In addition to this however I estimate there are overall three hundred and fifty-eight un-staged-directed silences or 'rests' as in a musical composition between passages of dialogue. There are some very long un-stage-directed silences, marked by page spaces, on pages seventeen, thirty-three, and forty-three. Such repetitive silences suggest a submerged stratum of script which is potent and dramaturgically affecting.

Much of the spirituality in this play is suggested within the eloquent silences which are part of the fabric of the dramatic language, operating to enhance Kane's chiaroscuro effects. The three lines

Remember the light and believe the light

An instant of clarity before eternal night

¹³⁷ Throughout the text of *4.48 Psychosis* from pages 3 to 43.

¹³⁸ *4.48 Psychosis*, p.25.

¹³⁹ *4.48 Psychosis*, p. 43.

don't let me forget.¹⁴⁰

as positioned between the lines 'as I scuttle like a beetle along the backs of their chairs'¹⁴¹ and 'I am sad'¹⁴², are separated on the page by spaces interposing further affecting silence. They have the impact of prayerful utterances (performative hybrid spirituality, as described by Anita Hammer).¹⁴³ The text slips and slides through various spiritual and non-spiritual registers. Brief aperçues of awareness emerge as fraught urges towards transcendence before textual negativity closes in again with almost Manichean forcefulness. 'I am sad / I feel that the future is hopeless and cannot improve' begins one and a half pages of self-lacerating criticism taking up about two minutes of stage time owing to the spaced-outness of the dialogue.¹⁴⁴

The effect of the emergence of sudden febrile autonomous spirituality is achieved through the juxtaposition of contrasting tonal passages such as:

No hope No hope No hope No hope No hope No hope No hope

A song for my loved one, touching her absence, the flux of her heart, the splash of her smile¹⁴⁵

The repetitive, angry despair of the first line undergoes an unseen change of temperament within the silent space before the next line which, contrastingly, expresses a rueful upsurge of the spirit, in lyrical language using tactile bodily epithets: touching, flux, splash. Passages like these suggest a crucible of negative and positive forces, both thanotic and erotic, at work in the silences which enliven the drama. This is a pattern which recurs throughout the play and is paradigmatic of the conflict between the vocal utterances. By reducing the verbal content, Kane believed she was making the drama 'felt rather than spoken'.¹⁴⁶ In the intensity of a dramatic language which has the power of poetry, she is facilitating, through techniques of silence, minimal statement and juxtaposition, Julia Kristeva's notion of 'poetic language's eternal function: to introduce through the symbolic that which works on, moves through and threatens it.'¹⁴⁷ Kristeva

¹⁴⁰ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 4.

¹⁴¹ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p.4.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁴³ Anita Hammer, *Between Play and Prayer* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), p.107.

¹⁴⁴ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁴⁶ Sarah Kane quoted in *In Yer Face Theatre*, p.101.

¹⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 81.

posits an arcane energy which, in poetic language, subverts the rational and creates possibilities for multiple meanings without ever naming that which 'works on, moves through and threatens' the symbolic. In poetic drama of this kind, that energy presents in various modes of spirituality.

In the admission 'At 4.48 /when desperation visits / I shall hang myself / to the sound of my lover's breathing'¹⁴⁸ the words of Robert Frost come to mind: 'We speak the literal to inspire / The understanding of a friend.'¹⁴⁹ Dramatically, the speaker is challenging the audience to listen, perhaps to sympathize and to follow the progress of the internal argument to its outcome. The direct appeal to the audience is, disarmingly, to treat the audience or reader as friend, engaging its attention and focus.

Minimal Appearance and Oblique Manifestation

'Remember the light and believe in the light' is an example of strategically-placed minimal appearance of Christian-religious spirituality in text.¹⁵⁰ It is repeated four times throughout the play, like a neglected, half-forgotten mantra although not the runic chant of *Equus* or *Top Girls*. The second minimal appearance of this line precedes the deep anger of a contradictory passage:

Come now, let us reason together
Sanity is found in the mountain of the Lord's house on the
horizon of the soul that eternally recedes
The head is sick, the heart's caul torn
Tread the ground on which wisdom walks
Embrace beautiful lies
the chronic insanity of the sane
the wrenching begins¹⁵¹

Here, Kane's disillusionment with religious spirituality results, in the text, to a regression to a more primitive, autonomous level which, unfortunately does not provide her with the traditional assurances she needs of a spirituality without God. The 'wrenching begins' in the text itself, with a heroic struggle for clarity and authenticisation

¹⁴⁸ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p.5.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Frost, 'Revelation' in *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966 (1955), p. 25.

¹⁵⁰ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 26.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

on the purely human level.¹⁵² Spirituality in *4.48 Psychosis* presents as a conflation of every kind so far encountered which befits a play about the disintegration of a mind and its longing for the light.

The speaker wants to remember the light, the single phrase becomes an intermittent mantra. (Eventually she wants the curtains opened, allowing more light in). But what follows is a despairing disillusionment at orthodox ways of remembering the light: the ways of the traditional Judaeo-Christian religion. The sardonic bitterness and disappointment of 'sanity is found in the mountain of the Lord's house on the horizon of the soul which eternally recedes'¹⁵³ evokes a soul (Kane's word) deceived and short-changed by doctrinal beliefs: 'The head is sick, the heart's caul torn'.¹⁵⁴ With the caul (amniotic sac) torn, and all extraneous indoctrinated wisdom stripped away, there is the possibility of a more authentic, personal vision breaking through to new birth and this hope is expressed in the passage beginning:

At 4.48
when sanity visits
for one hour and twelve minutes I am in my right mind.`
When it has passed I shall be gone again,
a fragmented puppet, a grotesque fool.¹⁵⁵

The mantra is repeated: 'Remember the light and believe the light. / Nothing matters more.'¹⁵⁶ The repetition of this groping for the light segues into a sequence of reassurance and 'It's all right. You will get better. Your disbelief cures nothing.'¹⁵⁷

In a passage lasting about half a minute in stage time there follows a serene plateau of acceptance in which the speaker touches 'her essential self'¹⁵⁸ and reaffirms the value of love:

Cut out my tongue
tear out my hair
cut off my limbs
but leave me my love¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Ibid., p.27.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.27.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.27.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.27.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p.28.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p 27.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 28.

in the language of martyrs, before chronic doubt resurfaces in six sequences of incredulous masochistic abjection ('beautiful pain which says I exist'). The brokenness of text evokes Kristeva's assertion that language fractures as an aspect of spiritual stasis and 'nothingness' in depression—'the abyss that with depressive persons, separates language from affective experience':¹⁶⁰

punch flicker flash burn dab press wring press

punch flicker float burn flash flicker burn

it will never pass¹⁶¹

Spiritual suffering is evoked in staccato-like bursts of epithets, each spitting out successive agonizing images over two pages (three minutes of stage time). There are minuscule gaps or small silences between these rapid-fire images of desolation, anger and pain in a rapidly-swinging pendulum of incredulity which subsides, hopelessly, into the recitation of a downward spiral of numbers. The dessication of language mimics 'the subjectivity which splits apart without regret' which Hélène Cixous argues is a characteristic of feminine behaviour and here serves to articulate pre-linguistic yearning.¹⁶²

As suggested above, oblique manifestation is an aspect of the vibrant area of minimal appearance and is characterized by statements such 'I came to you hoping to be healed' in which a world of hope is concentrated into a single sentence.¹⁶³ The manifestation is oblique in that the autonomous spirituality within the statement is subtly expressed. This comes before the slightly sardonic

You are my doctor, my saviour, my omnipotent judge, my priest, my god,
the surgeon of my soul.¹⁶⁴

Then, after a considerable silence suggested in the text by quadruple spacing, begins a surging litany of aims and aspirations, covering two and half pages (or about three minutes of stage time). In this, Kane uses lists as Eliot used lists to evoke a sense of

¹⁶⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 54.

¹⁶¹ *4.48 Psychosis*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁶² Hélène Cixous, *The Newly-Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 90.

¹⁶³ *4.48 Psychosis*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

crescendo-ing autonomous spirituality, as in *Murder in the Cathedral*, discussed in *Chapter Three*. These are deeply-felt, autonomous litanies of suffering and regret as in:

We know of extortion and violence,
Destitution, disease,
The old without fire in winter,
The child without milk in summer ¹⁶⁵

Ebbs and flows of textual rhythm are aspects of the musicality of the text. Unlike Eliot, the lists have small silences between them, indicated by spatial gaps, intensifying the drama:

To achieve goals and ambitions

To overcome obstacles and attain a high standard ¹⁶⁶

The lists afford a cumulative intensification of a hybrid spirituality in an Eros-oriented register, a voice of the heart with a Christian-religious timbre, yet paradoxically, in Cixous's terms, 'forging the anti-logos weapon' ¹⁶⁷ in prayerful and liturgical mode via

To belong

to be accepted

and then, finally, in the climactic epiphany of

to be forgiven

to be loved

to be free ¹⁶⁸

Then follows a space of about a third of a page suggesting profound un-nameable silence.

As indicated above, patterning is the dramaturgical device which holds this play of voices together and enables the vibrant areas to act as vehicles for the emergence of

¹⁶⁵ *Murder in the Cathedral, Part 11*, p. 43.

¹⁶⁶ 4.48 *Psychosis*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁷ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1, 4 (Summer 1976), 875-895 (p. 250).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31-33.

spirituality. Juxtaposition is a significant and recurrent feature of this patterning, as it is in Eliot, often creating a chiaroscuro effect of dark/light patterning and throwing into relief the serenely spiritual against the mundane, against anger or despair.

A scale on my skin, a seethe in my heart
A blanket of roaches on which we dance
The infernal state of siege
All this shall come to pass ¹⁶⁹

Repetition of key phrases, often with a veneer of irony, recalling Eliot's repetitive use of 'Hurry up please, it's time' in *The Waste Land*, homages to Eliot according to critic Lyn Gardner,¹⁷⁰ are used to show fitful emergence of the spiritual.¹⁷¹ 'Remember the light and believe the light' first used on page 4 as a kind of recurring prayerful trope of despair, recurs rhythmically on pages 26, 27, as part of a pattern. The writing of *4.48 Psychosis* with its animated dark/light, thanotic/erotic, patterning is less a suicide note than an attempt, in Kristevan terms, to impose an order on psychic confusion and distress, to make a spiritual stand, 'to survive' which 'language along with narrative can sustain while one is being ripped apart.'¹⁷²

Conclusion

Sarah Kane's dramatic writing is deceptive. On a superficial level, because of its visceral power, it is easy to miss layers of humanity which admit sudden modes and registers of spirituality within the written text which are capable of thought-provoking poignancy in performance.¹⁷³ Aleks Sierz and Graham Saunders have shown a gradual

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁷⁰ Lyn Gardner, 'Crave Review', *The Guardian*, 15 March, 2015<
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/mar/15/crave-sheffield-crucible-review>>
[accessed June 20, 2020]

¹⁷¹ Kane uses 'Hurry up please, it's time' in *Crave*, p. 162. Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen Drama, 2001), pp.152-200.

¹⁷² George Nivat, Olivier Mongin, Patsy Baudoin eds., 'The Novelist as Writing-while-Trembling', *The Individual Person at the Centre, An Interview with Julia Kristeva*, Los Angeles Review of Books, 19.3.20<lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-individual-person-at-the-centre-an-interview-with-julia-kristeva/[accessed 10.1.21]

¹⁷³ Tom Sellar, 'Truth or Dare: Sarah Kane's *Blasted*', *Theatre*, vol 27, no 1, 1997, pp.29-34; John Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England 1945-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Helen Iball, *Sarah Kane's Blast* (London: Continuum, 2008); Laurens de Vos, *Cruelty and Desire in the Modern Theatre: Antonin Artaud, Sarah Kane and Samuel Beckett* (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011); Jolene Armstrong, *Cruel Britannia* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015)

awakening to the spiritual content in the plays.¹⁷⁴ Spiritualities extraneous to faith also emerged in *The Ruth Ellis Show* and *Servants* and with this trajectory in critical mind the emergence of non-religious spirituality can also be recognised in Sarah Kane's two plays—which also revealed evidence of such hybridity and playfulness in composition. In both practice plays and in Kane, creativity and play help foster a hybrid mix of in-text spirituality according to the art of the author.

The five vibrant areas recognised in *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis* are similar in category to some of those used by Eliot, Fry, Bond, Shaffer and Churchill but with a different authorial slant. Like them, Kane shows how modes of spirituality may emerge within the negative scenarios of the text in paradoxical ways. In *Blasted* spirituality survives the relentless onslaught of the cynicism of the era challenging in dramatic increments the brutal and the demeaning. In *4.48 Psychosis* spirituality survives recognizably the obfuscation and psychic confusion of mental illness, resisting the complexities of monologic composition towards moments of transcendent lucidity.

Kane's visceral take relates in category, if not in style, to some of the vibrant areas found in my own exploratory practice. The repetitious nature of categories of vibrant areas, however differentiated by authorial intention, is thus indicated in the process of examination of texts.

Both of Kane's plays reveal themselves as consummately-structured works of art, enriching in their deep understanding of facets of humanity. In both there is evidence of a continuous reaching towards transcendence against relentless and almost insuperable odds: in *Blasted*, war and general atrophy of feeling; in *4.48 Psychosis*, depression and despair. A similar pattern is found in *Crave*, which precedes *4.48 Psychosis* and suggests an ongoing dialectic in Kane's dramatic texts from *Blasted* onwards between the urge towards transcendence and dark despair:

I want a real life
A real love
One that is rooted and grows upwards in daylight¹⁷⁵

Spirituality in Kane's plays can seem ironic or parodic even to those who might be looking for it but that is Kane's authorial ploy to compel the reader/audience to look more

¹⁷⁴ Aleks Sierz, *In Yer Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001); Graham Saunders, *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁵ *Crave*, Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen Drama [1998] 2001), p.190.

carefully, to reflect and refocus their perceptions on the unfolding dramatic narrative. The intention is evident from the early interrogatives in *Blasted*:

Ian Death. Not being.

Cate You fall asleep and then you wake up.

Ian How do you know?¹⁷⁶

and in *4.48 Psychosis* a paradigmatic statement to silence the critics:

Just a word on the page and there is the drama ¹⁷⁷

Points of emergence, where the text allows variations of autonomous spirituality to seep through the vibrant areas of imagery, silence, minimal appearance, oblique manifestation and stratification within the complex and highly-conscious dramaturgical patterning, bear witness to the author's ongoing theatrical sleight-of-hand with extremes of perception and feeling. 'To create something beautiful about despair is for me the most life affirming thing a person can do' asserted Kane in her interview with Sierz who was wanting to emphasise the negative and nihilistic aspects of her work, suggesting at one point she had created 'a godless universe'. Kane replied, 'I don't know. God does make an appearance (in *Blasted*). And there is life after death.'¹⁷⁸ Kane's with-in-text spirituality in these two plays is predominantly an authentic, passionate phenomenon with transformative, oblique and incremental leanings towards the religious. There are clear signs that Kane is attempting (courageously) to forge a spirituality extraneous to faith.

¹⁷⁶ *Blasted*, 1, p. 10.

¹⁷⁷ *4.48 Psychosis*, pp.11-12.

¹⁷⁸ Aleks Sierz, 'Sarah Kane: an Interview', 1 January, 2016

<<https://www.sierz.co.uk/writings/sarah-kane-an-interview/>>[accessed June 20. 2020]

Conclusion

All forms are stepping stones to meaning.¹

Peter Brook

For the way in which the word is experienced is always momentous.²

Walter J. Ong

If spirituality in playwriting has a link with the ineffable—that which is ‘too great or extreme to be expressed in words’—then the project of envisioning and categorising an extensive range of spiritual manifestations in dramatic writing is both paradoxical and plausible.³ In St John’s gospel the spirit is famously compared to the wind: ‘The wind breathes where it chooses.’⁴ A Biblical reference is not inappropriate within the parameters of this research, given the Christian background of most of the playwrights studied, and the quote does evoke the emergence of the spiritual in dramatic texts and the various modes in which it is engineered to emerge. This is not to make a claim, as does George Steiner, for a supernatural presence within the text, casting the author in the role of Catholic priest—what he calls ‘the *transubstantiation* within language and form’⁵—or to agree whole-heartedly with John Osborne that words are ‘the last link with God’ but to evoke the precarious selectivities and dark subversive transformative energies of a technologized creative process.⁶ If Kristeva herself uses the term *transubstantiation* to describe the richness of her own literary creativity, it is to acknowledge the mystery involved in ‘making a voyage around, or into, myself.’⁷ As a creative artist in her novel-writing ‘there is only one resurrection for me, and that is in

¹ Peter Brook, *Tip of the Tongue* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2017), p.55.

² Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1982), p.72.

³ Concise Oxford Dictionary, eleventh edition, ed. by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.726.

⁴ Gospel According to John, Ch 3, v 8, *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1989] 1995)

⁵ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.4.

⁶ Kenneth Tynan, ‘Osborne’, *The Observer*, July 7, 1968, p. 21; Proquest Historical Newspapers, The Guardian and The Observer [accessed at the British Library, 15.9.21]

⁷ John Sutherland, ‘Julia Kristeva: the ideas interview’, *The Guardian*, Higher Education, 14 March, 2006
<theguardian.com/education/2006/mar/14/highereducation.research1> [accessed 20.1.2010]

words.⁸ Such inexhaustive possibilities of words bear out the Kristevan sense of language's plethora of transformative hidden drives and energies.

Emerging in the creative act of playwriting, particularly in single-authored texts, the extraordinary range not only corresponds to the efficacy of the playwright's creative and selective powers but also to the re-visioned spirituality of post-war Britain and its evolution throughout the late twentieth century and beyond. In my research I identified a range of vibrant areas which emerged during my own dramatic compositions, showing complex modes and registers of the spiritual which furnished a methodology which was able to be applied to canonical work, noting how in canonical twentieth century plays spirituality-in-text functioned as an (often subtle) response to various spiritual challenges of the period e.g, the impact of impending war (Eliot), the influence of a repressive status quo (Fry), social fragmentation in the inner city (Bond), the malign grip of Thatcherism (Churchill) and the persistence of the spiritual in an increasingly secular world (Eliot, Kane). It was relatively easy to look back and note the historised provenance of spiritual challenges faced in the canonical works, less easy to understand the exact contemporary dynamics in a PAR setting when you are at once creator and critic. Distance is perhaps essential to thorough reevaluation.

My focus has been on spirituality's emergence in single-authored plays. To that end my practice-as-research—the exploratory writing of two new plays—was carried out in order to arrive at a methodology which might work in subsequent analyses of chronologically-chosen canonical works. I think it is unlikely that such vibrant areas, or new forms of them, would emerge as part of an organising structure in a carelessly-written play or in one with frivolous artistic aims.

A Revealing Methodology

A methodology evolved through practice to enable not only the identification of spirituality in the chosen texts of Eliot, Fry, Bond, Shaffer, Churchill and Kane but also to be flexible enough to facilitate an ongoing inquiry within the practice aspect which would test out, add to or complement those findings. To what extent was it successful? Much was dependent on close reading and listening, finding and acknowledging a playtext's forwards locomotive movement towards transcendent expression, observing, in close-up, the aspect of writing that Walter J. Ong described as 'the transformation of human consciousness.'⁹ If the methodology had its mainspring in affectivity—'doing

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 82.

knowing'¹⁰ in Robin Nelson's words where 'praxis is continually becoming'— this was not to underestimate or undervalue the necessary analysis and interrogation of identified passages.¹¹ 'Doing knowing', i.e. the writing of two original plays to explore at first hand the means by which spirituality emerged in text and to develop a working methodology, became an extension of the 'tacit knowledge' which Nelson argues marks the beginning of much practice as research work¹² or what Peter Brook, in less scientific terms, called 'the formless hunch'.¹³ The hunch, garnered from my reading of, or experience of, plays generally, as expressed in Chapter 1, provoked a sense that only practice would convincing lead to the creation of a transferrable methodology for examining canonical works. My practice was research in the sense of being able to give form to that hunch: the discovery of vibrant areas. Analysis and cross-referencing to the theories and thinking of Kees Wajjmann, James Hillman, Peter Brook and others, from the underlying perspective of Kristevan language theory, supported the view that spirituality in a dramatic text manifested itself across a broad spectrum.

The chosen methodology revealed that the cultural shifts and biases of the period from 1935 onwards in Britain contributed to the spirituality that emerged in the plays themselves. The spirituality in the plays was understood in the light of sociological findings from 1945 onwards anticipating Grace Davie's theory of unchurched spiritual development in Britain. Kristeva's language theories positing inner drives and energies, which may present in a text in positive or negative registers, supports the argument for a dramatic text newly-seen as alive with transformative possibilities and spiritual transcendence. That is, text as an animation of various spiritual possibilities which can be brought to life in reading and performance rather than as a dead artefact atrophied in print and typeface encouraging, according to Walter Ong, 'a sense of closure; a feeling of finality which has reached a state of completion'.¹⁴ The findings suggest a dramatic text is anything but that: not so much a blueprint for performance but a core text alive with possibility.

Practice indicated the seemingly inexhaustible potentiality for the differentiated emergence of spiritually-imbued pericopes within vibrant areas in an original playtext, as they are shown dependent on and revealing of the predisposition and creative intentions of the author. This in itself is an exciting discovery and bears out the truth of

¹⁰ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.46.

¹¹ Robin Nelson, p.50.

¹² Robin Nelson, p.40.

¹³ Peter Brook, *Tip of the Tongue* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2017), p.60.

¹⁴ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 174.

Peter Brook's repeated belief that theatre offers 'glimpses' of the spiritual, at least in so far as they appear in a dramatic text.¹⁵ So many contemporary playwrights—Jez Butterworth with his sense of the 'mystical' in dramatic composition, Florian Zeller with his experience of 'soul' shared with an audience in performance; and significant theatre practitioners—Robert Lepage with his recognition of a spiritual aspect to theatre, Richard Schechner with his Victor Turner-inspired theories of the performatively liminal—bear witness to the spiritual as a key component in drama that a fresh look at text was necessary in this post post-modern era.¹⁶

Researching in this way enabled a subsequent and, at times, parallel interrogation and search for spirituality, in its many layers, forms and differentiations in the playtexts of the six selected authors and, to some extent, was found to validate established sociological theory about the evolving and changing nature of faith and religion in Britain. As stated at the outset, 'playtext' in this research refers to the original dramatic language text as the basis for performance, what Richard Schechner called 'writing on a space' or 'the drama'.¹⁷ Schechner is referring to ancient cave artists writing on the walls of a darkened cave in their ritual processes but he also means writing on the blank space of a page which, in turn, becomes visible when performed within the 'empty space' of the stage. In a contemporary sense the space written on is, initially, the technologized space of the page. Various performances of all cited texts interrogated were attended and observed, where possible, at various points in the research process. This included full performances and rehearsed or staged readings before a live audience.

Supervised read-throughs and workshops of the pre-written, single-authored practice texts formed an essential part of the process, as explored in Chapter Two: 'That Dark Fountain': Vibrant Areas as Insights from Practice.¹⁸ Throughout the

¹⁵ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin Books, 1972 [1968]), p.50; *There Are No Secrets* (London: Methuen Drama, 1993), p.87; *Tip of the Tongue* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2017), pp.86/87.

¹⁶ Sarah Crompton, 'Jez Butterworth on life after Jerusalem', *The Telegraph, Theatre Features* (2013) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/10433276/Jez-Butterworth-on-life-after-Jerusalem.html>> [accessed 9 November, 2013] (para 4 of 4); Florian Zeller: 'I learnt how to be happy through theatre', Interview by David Sexton, *Evening Standard: Go London*, 23 September, 2015; *In Contact with the Gods: Directors Talk Theatre*, ed. by Maria M. Delgado and Paul Heritage (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.144; Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge Classics, 2003[1988]), pp.188-190.

¹⁷ Richard Schechner, p. 174; 70.

¹⁸ The term workshops throughout this thesis simply means the process by which the plays were put on their feet in the rehearsal room, not a process by which the plays

research my own experience of writing on the space fed into, conversed with and addressed the strategies used by the chosen canonical authors. I think a sense of what might be found, by setting both plays in the open parameters of such a space, both technologized and imagined—Kristeva’s sense of the not infertile void, prefigured, she argues, in Christian, Vedic and Taoist belief, ‘is not nothingness [and] contains in stylized forms the ideograms for a ‘tiger’ upon a ‘hill’” i.e. a potential for faith and transcendence—rather than in a naturalistically-described stage setting, contributed to my own expectations of discovery.¹⁹ Moreover, Kristeva’s reference to the image of the tiger is curiously reminiscent of Archbishop Anthony Bloom’s image for the nature of God which he insists should be regarded, in the Christian tradition, as more a tiger than a pussy-cat: ‘To meet God means to enter the cave of the tiger. [...] The realm of God is dangerous.’²⁰ Such considerations of a not infertile void influenced my decision, in *The Ruth Ellis Show*, to counterpoint fleeting, often invented, prose passages from the ‘remembered’ Old Bailey trial with deeper, more intimate, intense, fictionalised, affecting passages in iambic pentameter, helping to foreground whatever spiritual element arose, much as Eliot did through the juxtaposition of prose and verse in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

The seventeen different emergent vibrant areas can be grouped under three categories.

Language: imagery, rhapsodic utterance, linguistic effervescence, stratification, heightened sequence, runic chant;

Structure: patterning, prosody, minimal appearance, oblique manifestation, strategically-placed statement, relived-memory;

Stage Direction: dance, silence, quietness, incompleteness, stage direction.

Nine of these had emerged through PaR: imagery, prosody, patterning, strategically-placed statement, dance, silence, relived memory, rhapsodic language, and incompleteness. The same nine were found to emerge in the canonical plays in addition to eight newly-discovered areas: linguistic effervescence, stratification, quietness (Fry/Bond); heightened sequence, runic chat, stage direction (Shaffer/Churchill, Kane); minimal appearance, oblique manifestation and, again,

were written by an ensemble. The plays were pre-written and not developed in any final sense in rehearsal.

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love*, p. 33.

²⁰ Archbishop Anthony Bloom, *School for Prayer* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970), p.xv.

stratification (Kane). Any anticipated 'gaps' or nuances in meaning between the vibrant areas found in practice and those found in the canonical texts did not reveal themselves which suggests that vibrant areas arise organically through the creative devices of the author.

Perhaps the most striking finding regarding in-text spirituality was the way the spiritual presented in multiple permutations of the autonomous and the Christian-religious with often hybrid variations of the two and further complicated by positive and/or negative aspects. All this emerged according to the creative strategies of the author: mainly conscious strategies of dramatic composition but also drawing heavily on unconscious reservoirs of personal creativity. I found, in the act of writing, that the more language became fractured, either within itself or fractured within the dramatic structure of the dialogue and stage directions, the more it became able to admit negative, thanotic forces. Or, perhaps creatively, the need to evoke the negative fractured language and patterning. In *The Ruth Ellis Show*, Ruth's effulgent anger breaks up the line of iambic pentameter, allowing her inclination towards destructive action to break through her composure whereas, in *Servants*, Virginia's fractured speeches, ruminations and epiphanies veer towards expression in physical violence, the troubling elusiveness of her own repressed spirituality problematising her relationship with Millie. But evidence in text that the negative Thanatos-oriented register also fuels direct statements and tirades shows how dependent emerging spiritualities are on the conscious artistry of the author. Such a strategy is different from incompleteness where a positive urge towards transcendence cannot find the words for expression.

With the real purpose of finding within-text spirituality it was important, in practice, not to set out to write an obviously spiritual play. If I had set out to do that, the research may have been compromised or short-circuited. Worse still, the outcome may have been too narrowly circumscribed, pre-empted or even bowdlerised in some way. Instead, I chose dramatic subjects which might lend themselves to spiritual evocation on a wider, as yet not fully-explored, spectrum. Ruth Ellis's well-documented spiritual crisis in the weeks leading up to her execution and Virginia Woolf's fixation on spiritual matters during mental trauma, as indicated in her diaries and creative work, provided a necessarily open canvas for creative inquiry and interpretation. Perhaps trauma and suffering sensitised the real Ruth and Virginia to the power of the spiritual: this what I needed to capture in the fictionalisation. That these characters originated from opposing English classes and were feminine in gender provided a satisfying artistic challenge for myself, a male dramatist of working-class Irish origin. A more searching,

'double blind', follow-up questionnaire and a new staged reading was prevented unfortunately by pandemic restrictions. But in being able to recognise the vibrant areas so sharply and authentically, as was shown in the second chapter 'That Dark Fountain': Vibrant Areas as Insights from Practice, audience responders, through entering into a dialogic relationship with the play, appear to have been drawn into a corresponding spiritual experience which was remembered when they answered Question 3 of the Rapid Response Questionnaire. Furthermore, not wanting to assume generic spiritual components in dramatic texts accounts for the broadly chronologically-based choice of T.S Eliot, Christopher Fry, Edward Bond, Peter Shaffer, Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane. These authors reflected different evolving patterns of dramatic focus and composition in English drama over the years, both pre-war and post war. In every instance it was important not to underestimate the transforming power of the creative imagination.

The tortured spiritualities of Eliot's Chorus of the Women of Canterbury in *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) anticipate the shift away from authentic religious belief in post-war Britain, which like the Women themselves, manages to hang on to a reaffirmation of Christian awareness and belief in the closing moments of the play. The effervescent hybrid spirituality of Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning* (1948) expresses a sense of post-war relief and an embodied sense of new beginnings. Later on, Bond's *Saved* (1965) vividly demonstrates how such innate spiritual effervescence can be stifled and treated with scorn and self-doubt in an austere inner-city world of job loss and cultural aridity. Further on, as if mirroring Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead's observation of a subjective turn in British society's rejection of Christian belief, Shaffer animates the profound confusion of adolescent groping towards a sustaining religious belief in *Equus* (1973), with a violent and negative twist. Churchill compounds the misdirection of the spiritual impulse in *Top Girls* (1982) with her portrayal of a character, Marlene, whose only genuine expression of spirituality is in the party she throws for a variety of achieving women from different centuries. Sarah Kane dramatises the subjective turn by showing how it survives, in a dessicated and agonised manner, in *Blasted* (1995) and in *4.48 Psychosis* (2000) towards the end of the long bitter twentieth century. In practice, now in the twenty-first century, the spirituality observed emerging in original composition was recognised as part of an evolving continuum found to be present in the eight canonical works and provided a way of negotiating the range of spirituality within their texts. In all the texts the dominant mode of spirituality was what I have termed 'autonomous', with non-religious rather than religious expression, with 'hybrid' as a secondary manifestation, and genuine 'Christian-religious' spirituality notable by

its minimal yet powerful presence. The methodology was successful in pin-pointing the incremental nature of the spiritual in dramatic composition even if the three categories it was found to emerge in were necessarily simplified.

It's always possible that, apart from T.S. Eliot, a deeply religious, unproduced playwright does exist (or will exist) somewhere in British society rather like the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins existed unknown in the Victorian age and will provide evidence of a purely religious sensibility. This, of course, would not need to be a Christian dramatist. Spirituality, in the main, in the plays' analyses, as noted above, is not found to be in the Christian mode although hybrid forms in various vibrant areas in the plays of Christopher Fry, Peter Shaffer and Sarah Kane suggest that the religious sense was never lost.

Spirituality in the Canonical Works

All six canonical dramatists were seen to have access to spiritual reserves which informed the creative enterprise of writing their plays. Spiritual reserve was there in the sense of a specific reservoir of creativity which could be accessed in the service of the playwright's vision. Spiritual reserve, as such, is revealed in the discovery of relevant holding areas of text reflecting particular kinds or gradations of spirituality. Spirituality was found not to inhabit the whole text of every play studied. On the contrary, it often made fleeting or minimal appearances whereas in other texts its presence is more substantial and extensive.

These vibrant areas of amplified dramatic meaning demonstrate the strategic artistry of the dramatists and may impact subtly on why the estates of certain writers are very protective of how the scripts are to be performed. Such spiritual reserve manifested itself in different guises, permutations and categories in the text with each creative endeavour. In some cases—in *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, *The Lady's Not for Burning*, *Equus* and *4.48 Psychosis*—it was as if each play was predicated on a spiritual substratum, a substratum distinct from the religious but likely to have a conversation with it. In others—*Blasted*, *Saved*—it is as if an autonomous human non-religious spirituality was consciously or unconsciously embedded in the text as an additional dramaturgical feature. In *Top Girls* spirituality itself was sidelined and relegated to the wings, as it were, to appear in sublimated, hyper-real, dramatic form in the opening scene. The suggestion of a spiritual substratum was also recognised in the composition of my own twenty-first century work and supports the view that a multi-faceted spirituality may be embedded in text as a strategic creative enterprise by the author.

Kristevan Theory as a Reconciling Methodological Tool

Kristevan theory as a methodological tool reconciling and therefore making credible the emergence of autonomous non-religious modes of spirituality in the text with the Christian religious (and hybrid states) revealed its advantages and disadvantages in application. Its basis in psychoanalytic theory was at once its strength and drawback: Kristeva's insights into the layered fertility of language helped divulge a range of spiritual propensities but the overall philosophy of psychoanalysis tended to restrict a broader, unqualified acceptance of the religious.

There is something particularly shrewd in Kristeva's approach to understanding the nature of belief in an Absolute by placing it on the adolescent spectrum of human development. As argued, this view can be reconciled with a religious stance, particularly, as found in this study, the Christian, if one remembers the advice from Matthew's gospel that 'unless you change and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'.²¹ Or, more contemporaneously, one remembers Albert Einstein's advice to his friend Otto Juliusburger to 'never grow old. no matter how long you live. Never cease to stand like children before the great mystery into which we were born.'²² Unafraid to discuss mystery as an aspect of the subject in process—the unknowable complexity of the evolving human being—or to assert that 'transcendence is a universal anthropological need' the intellectual generosity of Kristevan theory nevertheless allows for insightful and expansive interpretations of the spiritual as it manifests itself in dramatic language.²³

Her theory of *chora* hypothesizes a fertilising human source—'metaphorically suggesting something nourishing and maternal'—prior 'the syllable' but within the constructs of language which corresponds to the 'dark fountain' of spirituality which can be accessed and encouraged to emerge in dramatic compositions.²⁴ *Chora*, adapted from a concept of Plato positing a receptacle which harbours mysterious undirected creative energies (Freud's instinctual drives) 'extracts the body from its homogenous shell' and, in turning it into 'a space which links to the outside', facilitates

²¹ Gospel According to Matthew, Ch 18, v 4, *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1989] 1995).

²² Albert Einstein, 'Letter to Otto Juliusburger', Princeton, 29 September, 1947.

²³ George Nivat, Olivier Mongin, Patsy Bandoins eds., *The Individual Person at the Centre: An Interview with Julia Kristeva*, Los Angeles Review of Books, 19.3.20 <lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-individual-person-at-the-centre-an-interview-with-julia-kristeva/> [accessed 10.1.21]

²⁴ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love*, p.5.

recognition of embryonic spirituality in plays which may not be categorised as religious but are indisputably profoundly human.²⁵

If the 'dark fountain' image, generated in the writing of *Servants*, has a correlative in Kristeva's *chora* it should not be identified merely as a psychoanalytic phenomenon but more as a literary locomotive device enabling moments of transcendence in written drama. Like the *chora*, the 'dark fountain' is a semiotic articulation which may propel creative writing and energise it but, unlike the *chora*, it embodies and characterises the in-text spirituality itself through whatever medium, poetry or prose, the playwright wishes to use. The 'dark fountain' does not consciously shape and direct creativity, but functions as a *hidden* organic propensity enabling composition.

Her sense of 'that which threatens the symbolic' opens up discussion of ineffable forces which destabilise language, allowing that which cannot be named to occupy strategic positions within text, so amplifying dramatic meaning.²⁶ This threatening of the symbolic is ascribed by Kristeva to the agency of poetic language drawing on the *chora* in opening up a plethora of meanings in a poetic text. In my use of iambic pentameter for *The Ruth Ellis Show*, this was indeed found to be the case, as explained in Chapter 2. The versification of *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, *The Lady's Not For Burning* and, to an extent, the rhythmic prose poetry of *4.48 Psychosis*, also bore witness to a poetic intensity transmitting meanings which threatened the symbolic but in different ways. For example the dense arcane imagery of Eliot facilitating a surprising pre-religious spirituality in the texts of both his plays and the effervescent word-play of Fry conveying a youthful embryonic spirituality which seriously threatens the complacency of the status quo. It became clear that, in practice and in observing the emergence of spirituality in canonical works such as *Saved*, *Blasted*, *Equus* and *Top Girls* the spiritual found ways of emerging through prose and was not dependent on the medium of versification to facilitate its emergence.

The many strengths of Kristevan theory are anchored in its insightful awareness of the layeredness and the possibilities for meaning of language, what she calls 'the translinguistic modalities of psychic inscription'.²⁷ For Kristeva these operate within the realm of the semiotic and there is no proscription on these semiotic energies being found to be spiritual. Her sense of 'that which threatens the symbolic' opens up

²⁵ Julia Kristeva, *The Subject in Process*, p.143.

²⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p.81.

²⁷ Julia Krsiteva, *In the Beginning was Love*, p.5.

discussion of ineffable forces which destabilise language, allowing that which cannot be named to occupy strategic positions within text, so amplifying dramatic meaning.²⁸ The semiotic in Kristevan theory is freighted with the mysterious, for which she offers no apology, so that text may be seen to be loaded with meaning other than which may be observed in the symbolic. The mystery Kristeva acknowledges lies in the complexity of the unfolding of language in a creative dynamic between anyalysand and analyst, a process which she says veers 'towards metaphysics, yielding not only maximal lucidity but also a sacrifice of lucidity for which one need not feel any guilt'.²⁹ She contextualises this process in 'the realm of imagination, play and possibility' and it is within this dialogic realm, I suggest, that the dramatist writes.³⁰ Kristeva's theory of the rich and mysterious stratifications of text helps to convey how spirituality emerges within the compositional devices of the author.

The darker side of Kristevan theory— abjection—introduces a conceptual framework for the recognition of negative transformative energies at work in dramatic texts.³¹ Energies so affective and otherwise inexplicable as to fall under the category of the negatively spiritual as characterised vividly by Shaffer in his portrayal of Alan Strang. Even her understanding of religious impulse— in contrast to Carl Jung— as being an adolescent reaching towards an Absolute may be seen, paradoxically, to illuminate the challenge all religious people have in sustaining faith in an invisible, at times incommunicable, God i.e. a God seemingly not answering prayer or distant from individual lives as characterised by Eliot in his *Women of Canterbury*.

Is not evoking mystery a fundamental aspect of theatrical performance? Kristevan insights certainly helped to reveal a complex compositional machinery at work in the dramatists. If that is so, spirituality, paradoxically, sits well within its inclusive parameters.

Implications of the Revaluation of Playscripts

Critically revaluing late twentieth century and early twenty-first century English dramatic scripts in the light of the above findings means sharing in the revised spirituality animated in the representative plays. Eliot, Fry, Bond, Shaffer, Churchill, and Kane reveal various degrees of awareness of spiritual presence in their writing for the theatre. The linguistic animation of this phenomenon depends on the authorial

²⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.81.

²⁹ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love*, p. 62.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 62.

³¹ Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016),p.111.

vision of what was considered possible in the creative process according to their artistic acumen. The plays explored for their vibrant areas can be revalued as artworks freighted with evidence of multi-faceted spiritualities locked within their texts and likely to emerge in reading and performance. As shown, a variety of critics—newspaper, magazine, academic—have, over the years, drawn fleeting and vague attention to this phenomenon in some of the canonical plays. Some audience members, notably, were able to home in on vibrant areas as performed in the practice plays in their answers to the rapid-response practice questionnaire. All playwrights seemed, in their creativity, to have been able to access that area of the psyche which Eliot termed ‘a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus’ which lies ‘beyond the nameable classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life.’³² Or an area, as designated by Jez Butterworth, as ‘somewhere that isn’t you’.³³

Revaluing playtexts in this way through finding and naming the areas of text where spirituality may be found implies a critical reconsideration of how the plays themselves may be understood. A recognition of vibrant areas in the text not only amplifies a play’s meaning but also broadens an understanding of how the play may be acted and directed. This in turn logically might lead to a re-estimation and refocusing of their place in the canon. Moreover, the methodology of accessing vibrant areas which admit particular technologized modes and registers of the spiritual—the non-religious autonomous, the hybrid and the Christian-religious, in either erotic or thanotic spiritual registers, or mash-ups of all three—may be applied across literary genres not dependent on the strategic devices of dramatic works such as poetry, essays, novels, and short stories, and can afford useful insights into a literary work’s meaning.³⁴ It goes without saying that modes of the religious other than Christian may well be found in an examination of other dramatic texts. There is room for practical as well as critical application on a broad canvas of literary work. A fuller

³² T S Eliot, ‘Poetry and Drama’ (1951) in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 86-87.

³³ Sarah Crompton, ‘Jez Butterworth on life after Jerusalem’, (paragraph 4 of 4).

³⁴ I presented a well-received analysis, from the perspective of theatre and performance, of works by Walter de la Mare at the *Reading Walter de la Mare* conference at Cambridge University in September 2018. See <https://readingwalterdelamare.wordpress.com/> In his poem *The Listeners*, for example, I showed how the poem consists of a series of stage directions which evoked the liminal. This, in turn, was compared and contrasted to how stage directions did similar things in Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*. The paper was considered ‘a valuable addition’ to Walter de la Mare studies by the organisers Yui Jakita and Anna Nickerson.

appreciation of the transmissive power of dramatic language beyond drama itself opens up new vistas of knowledge.

By attending to the complex web of creativity in dramatic writing from the experiential point of view and the phenomena it may contain in the practice plays, and then with regard to the canonical texts, careful consideration may be advised on the cutting of established texts and the significant spiritual tropes which may be lost as result of that action. Such a language-based methodological tool can also be used for the further discovery of other forms of spirituality in dramatic texts, a reach not possible within the remit of this practice-as-research thesis in which the practice was the discovery of vibrant areas through the writing of two new works. For example: spirituality in collaborative texts and the means by which it got there; gender-specific spirituality in feminist authorial work; further exploration of religious spirituality in contemporary playwriting; and the relatively unexplored realm of GLBTQ+ spirituality in dramatic writing. Such explorations are likely to open up new fields of fruitful, if problematic, academic enquiry. In acknowledging that spirituality may be found in dramatic texts, access can be made into hitherto unrecognised areas expressive of the wide and profound depths of our own humanity.

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Appendix 1. Practice-as-Research Play

THE RUTH ELLIS SHOW

A Verse Drama

by **Christopher O'Shaughnessy**

ACT ONE: IN DREAMS

ACT TWO: IN NIGHTMARE

CHARACTERS

RUTH ELLIS
RUTH 2
ANDRÉ, her son, aged ten
ARTHUR, her father
DAVID BLAKELEY
COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION
COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE
JUDGE
GEORGE ELLIS
DESMOND CUSSEN
ANT FINDLATER
CAROL FINDLATER
JACKIE DYER
MAURY CONLEY
BERTHA
NUN
WARDER, female
CLERK OF THE COURT
FOREMAN
MALE CUSTOMER
CHAPLAIN
CLARE ANDREA McCALLUM
FRIEND
ALBERT PIERREPOINT
ASSISTANT
PHOTOGRAPHER 1
PHOTOGRAPHER 2
JOHN BICKFORD
VICTOR MISHCON
RADIO VOICE/COMMENTATOR

Above are the principal characters. A cast of nine could play all the parts, with some playing multiple roles. RUTH ELLIS should be played by one actor, as should the part of ANDRÉ. Played by a cast of nine, allocation of parts could be as follows:

1. RUTH ELLIS
2. RUTH 2, WARDER
3. ANDRÉ, *her son, aged ten*
4. DAVID BLAKELY, CLARE ANDREA McCALLUM, ASSISTANT, RADIO COMMENTATOR
5. GEORGE ELLIS, CHAPLAIN, DEFENCE COUNSEL, PHOTOGRAPHER 1, VICTOR MISHCON
6. DESMOND CUSSEN, MAURY CONLEY, CLERK OF THE COURT, PHOTOGRAPHER 2
7. ANT FINDLATER, JUDGE, FRIEND, MALE CUSTOMER, JOHN BICKFORD
8. PROSECUTING COUNSEL, FOREMAN, ALBERT PIERREPOINT, ARTHUR, RADIO VOICE /COMMENTATOR
9. JACKIE DYER, CAROLE FINDLATER, BERTHA, NUN

All the characters except RUTH ELLIS, RUTH 2 and ANDRÉ form vocal medleys which become choral in certain sequences. When this happens is made clear in the text. RUTH ELLIS is permanently among a constellation of characters.

The characters' names are placed centre page for ease of reading the iambic pentameter lines, which are often fractured or shared among characters. The format is used in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. The layout was appreciated by the actors in the workshops.

The play is written mainly in verse with occasional use of prose for the court sequences.

An oblique stroke denotes an intermittent pause in the dialogue. An extended dash denotes a line of unspoken iambic pentameter. Italics in dialogue are there to suggest acute emotional emphasis; italics in bold, even more so.

ACT ONE: IN DREAMS

Central Criminal Court, Old Bailey, London.

A large Sword of Justice on high in the background, pointing upwards.

RUTH ELLIS *stands on a podium. The JUDGE in the judge's chair.*

Silence.

CLERK OF THE COURT:

Members of the jury, will your foreman please stand?

The FOREMAN stands.

Mr Foreman of the Jury are you agreed upon your verdict?

FOREMAN:

We are.

RUTH, *neatly-dressed in a black two-piece suit and white silk blouse, her platinum hair freshly-coiffeured, projects poise, graciousness, radiance.*

CLERK OF THE COURT:

Do you find the prisoner at the Bar, Ruth Ellis, guilty or not guilty of the murder of David Blakely?

FOREMAN:

Guilty.

RUTH *looks outwards then smiles briefly at someone in the court.*

CLERK OF THE COURT:

You find her guilty, and that is the verdict of you all?

FOREMAN:

Yes.

CLERK OF THE COURT:

Prisoner at the Bar, you stand convicted of murder. Have you anything to say before judgement of death is passed according to law?

RUTH:

.....

The JUDGE places the black cap on his head. Silence.

JUDGE:

Ruth Ellis, the jury have convicted you of murder. In my view, it was the only verdict possible.

RUTH bows her head. A ripple of voices around the court.

The sentence of the court upon you is that you shall be taken hence to a lawful prison, and thence to a place of execution, and that you shall be hanged by the neck until you be dead, and that your body be buried within the precinct of the prison within which you shall last have been confined before your execution, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul.

CHAPLAIN:

Amen.

Pause.

RUTH (*quietly*):

Thank you.

Pause.

A female WARDER emerges from the shadows.

RUTH steps down from the podium, as if from a stage, peering outwards momentarily.

The CHAPLAIN, JUDGE, CLERK OF THE COURT and FOREMAN exit.

She follows the WARDER toward a small table and two chairs. A tall wardrobe on castors stands to one side.

RUTH keeps looking back into the shadows. The WARDER turns, imitating her action.

RUTH:

I was expecting...was expecting... I—

Pause.

WARDER:

—don't think... I don't think— there's— anything—

Pause.

No reprieve. No... **no**...

Pause.

She takes a pair of calico knickers out of a paper bag and puts them on the table.

Pause.

These—these—are for you.

RUTH:

Hardly likely to secure a Vogue shoot.

Maybe Picture Post... What—what are they for?

An uncertain smile.

WARDER:

.....

You must wear them.

RUTH:

Wear them?

WARDER:

Now.

RUTH:

Help me please.

Help me—adjust the cords—

She stands up, removes her old undergarment and slips on the calico version. They do up the fastening cords.

Pause.

WARDER:

Are you afraid?

RUTH:

Afraid? No, no. **No!** Its —

Like having a tooth pulled. (*Slight pause: another smile.*) Don't like dentists.

She makes a face. The WARDER leaves.

Silence.

A low grinding noise. The wardrobe slides aside, creating an aperture to a darkened space.

ALBERT PIERREPOINT *stands in the shadows on the other side.*

A noose descends slowly out of the darkness.

PIERREPOINT *steps towards RUTH.*

PIERREPOINT:

Follow me.

He turns. RUTH follows. They walk through the aperture.

PIERREPOINT *indicates the noose. RUTH stops abruptly.*

PIERREPOINT'S ASSISTANT *comes forward with a leather thong to bind her hands. RUTH steps back.*

Pause.

RUTH:

Not yet! You must—you must ***wait***

A little Mr Pierrepoint.

PIERREPOINT *gazes at her expressionlessly.*

RUTH:

Must ***wait***—

You must wait a little, Mr Pierrepoint.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think—

Never in my wildest dreams— did I think—

Fifties jazz music. Buzz of conversation, laughter. Smoke, coloured light.

A bar, some stools. The noose ascends back into darkness.

You must wait a little—Mr Pierrepoint—
There's so much—that people don't know about—

*Out of the smoke and shadows a neon sign: **The Little Club**. Exit PIERREPOINT and his ASSISTANT.*

Enter JACKIE DYER and MALE CUSTOMER.

MALE CUSTOMER:
When I your next movie, Ruth? Next movie?

JACKIE:
Why can't Miss Dors get you a part? Why not?
You're wearing her hair.

A few drunken giggles. RUTH is now pouring a drink behind the bar.

RUTH:
It's *my* hair, dyed blonde!
Hollywood ash blonde! Martini was it?

She comes out from behind the bar. Hands the drink to the MALE CUSTOMER.

Two pounds and tuppence halfpenny to you.

The MALE CUSTOMER catches her arm and pulls her to him.

Spill it and you will be paying again.

MALE CUSTOMER:
I know what I'm paying for, sweetie.

RUTH:
True.

JACKIE:
Ruth knows a hard one when sees one.

More giggles.

RUTH:
Shush!

She flicks something off her sleeve.

I'm sure there are fleas in this erstwhile place.
Fleas and God knows what else, God knows what else.

MAURY CONLEY *enters from the shadows.*

MAURY:
Got someone special for you tonight, Ruth.
You heard of Aga Khan? the Aga Khan?

RUTH *turns to him.*
Well, this is his brother.

RUTH:
Only Aga
You know is what your wife warms on.

MAURY:
Be nice.

He walks off into the shadows.

RUTH:
I knew there were fleas in this erstwhile place.

JACKIE:
Don't let him hear you say that, Ruth.

RUTH:
Why not?
The Aga Khan hasn't got a brother,
If he did he'd hardly rate *The Little Club*.

JACKIE:
But they do, Ruth. Parceque it *is* little.
C'est le petit club, c'est la vie en rose!

RUTH:
Jackie, the rent's got to come from somewhere.
He charges me a fortune for that flat!

MALE CUSTOMER:
You do well, Ruth. Maury loves you really.

RUTH *moves downstage. Exit JACKIE DYER and MALE CUSTOMER.*

ANDRÉ, *a boy of ten years, enters holding, at arm's length, an automatic. He walks towards RUTH, pointing the gun at her.*

RUTH:

You know I don't like you playing with that,

He stands pointing the gun.

ANDRÉ:

Why do you leave me?

RUTH holds her hand out for the gun He gives it her.

RUTH:

Give mummy a kiss.

He does.

I don't leave you, not on purpose.

ANDRÉ:

You do.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL (*offstage*):

Mrs Ellis—

RUTH:

André, it's time for bed.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL *steps forward from the shadows.*

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Mrs Ellis, when you fired that revolver —when you fired that revolver at close range—into the body of David Blakely, what did you intend to do?

RUTH *ignores this, looking at ANDRÉ.*

RUTH:

Go to bed, darling. We're leaving early.

ANDRÉ:

Early?

RUTH:

We're—we're meeting George.

ANDRÉ:

Meeting George?

ANDRÉ *exits.* RUTH *walks over to the bar. She puts the gun in her handbag.*

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Mrs Ellis— Mrs Ellis—

RUTH *half turns to him.*

RUTH:

No, no.

Exit PROSECUTING COUNSEL.

GEORGE ELLIS *enters and walks to the bar.*

GEORGE:

You have very lovely teeth, you know that?

RUTH *ignores him, polishing a wine glass.*

Teeth like pearls, pearls from the deep dark ocean.

RUTH:

Hoping for a second discount on your drink?

GEORGE:

Beautiful, beautiful teeth.

RUTH:

Not my eyes?

GEORGE:

Teeth.

RUTH:

It's an *original* chat-up line.

GEORGE:

I'm a dentist.

RUTH:

Don't look like a dentist.

What will you have?

Enter RUTH's mother, BERTHA HORNBY.

BERTHA:

George Ellis was an alcoholic drinker and turned out to be a cruel man. It was a lonely house. My daughter sitting by herself night after night, her husband coming home in a taxi because he was unable to stand, he was so drunk. One of these occasions he told my daughter to go into the kitchen.

RUTH *walks into the kitchen*. GEORGE *locks the door behind him*. *Grabbing her by the hair, he pulls her across the room. He slams her head against the wall. Again. She bleeds. He knocks her the to the floor. RUTH crawls to her feet, pushes him away.*

She ran into the garden and stayed behind a bush— all night. She let the next day and came to stay with me. I put her to bed and kept her there for several days.

Exit BERTHA.

GEORGE:

I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

RUTH *gives him a kiss*.

We'll take the boat out, get in some sea air,
Rinse our minds clean of the blood and the pain.

RUTH:

What about André?

GEORGE:

Your mother takes care—

RUTH:

I'm his mother, don't ever forget that!

GEORGE:

By you're so busy! Busy, busy Ruth.

RUTH:

And you're so bloody drunk, most of the time.
How can I audition for that film part—
How can I get anywhere *near* Pinewood—
When will that name work for me? When will it?

GEORGE:

You want to be a star!

RUTH:

You're laughing at—
Do you understand what this *means* to me?

GEORGE:

A star, you want to be a fucking star!

RUTH:

And what if I do want that? What if I do?
Isn't that the done thing nowadays, to
Rise above your station? Rose above yours!
When you weren't drunk, weren't always bloody drunk.

GEORGE *raises his hand. She grabs it strongly.*

RUTH:

Hit me and you'll never see me again.

GEORGE:

I'm sorry. (*Slight pause. He looks at her.*) I bought something for you.

He reaches inside a carrier-bag., takes out a bunch of red carnations. RUTH recoils in horror. In the shadows, CLARE ANDREA MCCALLUM, a French-Canadian G.I. stands with a larger bunch of red carnations.

GEORGE:

Here.

RUTH:

Goodbyes are said with red carnations.

She takes them, staring past him at CLARE who steps back into the shadows. RUTH 2 appears, identically dressed, observing from a distance.

RUTH (*calling*):

Why did you leave me? Why? Why? Why?

GEORGE:

Leave you?

I haven't fucking left you.

He snatches the flowers away, throwing them to the floor.

We need to get away, away from all this.

He looks at the red carnations on the floor. RUTH walks towards where CLARE was.

RUTH:

Why did you leave me?

Exit GEORGE and RUTH 2.

*The Little Club sign illumines out of the darkness
Smoke; chink of glasses. RUTH moves behind the bar,
polishing glasses.*

BERTHA:

Clare Andrea Mc Callum. I had written to his commanding officer. I sensed that all was not right. She was seventeen and I felt, as a mother should, protective towards my daughter. They told me he was a married man. Had a family of three children back home in Quebec.

BERTHA picks up the scattered carnations. CLARE circles RUTH, carrying his carnations.

JACKIE:

I heard you had a pay rise.

RUTH:

But there are

Special responsibilities.

BOTH (*laughing*):

Oh no!

RUTH:

Oh yes!

Enter MAURY CONLEY. CLARE still present.

MAURY:

You won't forget?

RUTH:

Forget what?

JACKIE:

Quoi?

MAURY:

Ruth knows what I am referring to.

JACKIE:

Yes?

Exit MAURY CONLEY. CLARE still looking at RUTH.

BERTHA:

By then he was pregnant wither first child:

André.

Music: Sh-Boom by The Chords. RUTH and JACKIE dance around together, laughing, elaborately marking time to the music, joining in on the Sh-Boom..

CLARE touches RUTH gently, dropping the carnations on the pile. BERTHA finishes picking up the flowers and wrapping paper and exits.

Exit CLARE. The radio is switched off suddenly.

MAURY CONLEY:

Don't forget.

CLERK OF THE COURT:

The second witness.

A crack of thunder. Sound of a storm. Waves crashing.

RUTH, GEORGE and a FRIEND are in a boat in the English Channel. GEORGE and the FRIEND are drunk. RUTH tries to steer the boat. Rough seas.

GEORGE:

Sea air, sussurating salty sea air!

FRIEND (*taking swig of whisky*):

A'ye, cap'n.

GEORGE:

Can't beat it.

FRIEND:

Can't beat it, no sir!

More whistling of wind, crashing of waves. A flash of lightning.

GEORGE:

Shushurating shalty shee air, shush.....!

FRIEND (*gesturing to RUTH*):

Shush.....! Shush, shush, shush, shush, shush, shush, shush, shush, shush!

RUTH:

So much for the salt sea air! You're both drunk:
The boat's sinking in the English Channel;
I'm the only one who's bloody sober!

More crashing waves. Lightning, thunder. ANDRÉ in bed, RUTH nearby. Exit GEORGE and FRIEND. Rain falling. RUTH 2 emerges from the shadows, watching.

ANDRÉ:

Tell me about the war.

RUTH:

About the war?

CLERK OF COURT:

Call the second witness, Mr—

ANDRÉ:

What happened.

RUTH:

I've told you too much about the war.

The PROSECUTING COUNSEL and ANT FINDLATER emerge from the shadows. RUTH and ANDRE seem oblivious of their presence.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Anthony Seaton Findlater. Is that your name?

ANT:

Yes.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

And you live at 29 Tanza Road, N.W.3.?

ANT:

Yes.

ANDRÉ:

The way your shoes melted on the way to work.

RUTH:

The crêpe of my shoes melted in the heat?

Melted—drizzling on the hot bricks?

ANDRÉ:

Again.

The way you pulled grandad from the rubble.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL (to ANT):

And you are a motor engineer?

ANT:

Yes.

RUTH:

Who told you—

ANDRÉ:

Bertha.

RUTH:

—this—?

She laughs.

The doodlebug.

Yes, I did pull grandad from the rubble.

Slight pause.

The second world war is still going on.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Mr Findlater, when you first met Mrs Ellis, how would you describe her?

ANDRÉ:

The second world war is still going on?

RUTH:

No more hot bricks, crêpe soles or drizzling shoes:

The memory of those sights we never lose.

ANDRÉ:

We keep the memory but the days are gone?

RUTH:

The second world war is still going on.

ANT:

How would I describe her?

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

In a few words.

RUTH (*looking round, as if at something*):

We have the fear, the pain which never goes—

ANDRÉ:

The pain which circles like our world war foes?

ANT:

She was prone to frequent outbursts of bad temper, fits of jealousy and the like. It was an embarrassment, really.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

An embarrassment?

ANT:

It was an embarrassment as much for Carole as for me.

RUTH:

The target hit, you'd think it would be done.

The second world war is still going on.

PIERREPOINT *emerges from the shadows, looking at RUTH. ANDRÉ turns, looks at him, then at RUTH. PIERREPOINT steps back.*

ANDRÉ:

Was it so very long ago, this war?

RUTH:

About as far as you would want it for.

ANDRÉ:

How near, how far was it? Please tell your son.

RUTH:

The second world war is still going on.

RUTH *pulls a blanket gently over ANDRÉ.*

RUTH (to ANDRÉ):

Sleep tight.

She kisses him on the head.

Night.

She walks downstage. ANDRÉ sits on a chair. She picks up a single red carnation.

Love never has the last word.

MAURY (*calling*):

Another client for you, Ruth. Be good.

RUTH:

At every corner the face of a man—

ANT:

If I may say, Mrs Ellis was a duplicitous presence in our circle.

RUTH (*turning towards him*):

Why could I never trust you? Why was that?

A telephone rings. ANDRÉ answers it. He puts his hand over the receiver before speaking.

ANDRÉ (to RUTH):

It's Stephen.

RUTH (*quietly questioning*):

Stephen?

She shakes her head, twisting the carnation.

ANDRÉ:

Mum is not here. / No.

He puts down the phone. She hands the twisted carnation to ANDRÉ. The phone rings again. She

motions him not to answer. The ringing stops.

ANDRÉ:

Who is Stephen?

Music: theme from Housewives' Choice. RUTH takes the gun from her handbag, looks at it carefully, turning it over as if it's an alien object. ANDRÉ observes. Suddenly, sensing someone coming, she puts it back in her handbag. She motions ANDRÉ to leave. He does.

Enter CAROLE FINDLATER.

CAROLE:

You've known David some time?

RUTH:

Not that long, no. Met at *The Little Club*.

It was quiet. We got talking.

CAROLE:

Talking?

RUTH:

Talking.

CAROLE:

Talking?

RUTH:

Why shouldn't we be talking?

CAROLE:

But of *what* were you talking you and he?

RUTH:

This and that. He—he wants to race some cars.

CAROLE:

Davis has a prototype. Should be fun.

Pause. They look at each other.

We race at Brands Hatch, maybe the Grand Prix!

Le Mans is popular with us. Le Mans.

RUTH *looks at her*.

Do you like racing? Are you fond of speed?

RUTH:

Speed?

CAROLE:

Speed. Racing. David is keen on speed.

You'll find David is nothing if not keen.

RUTH:

I'll find David is nothing if not keen?

CAROLE:

Yes. Once he has his foot on the pedal.

Slight pause.

It's an absolute pleasure meeting you.

I'm— I'm Carole Findlater.

RUTH:

Ruth Ellis.

CAROLE:

I can see we're really going to get on.

RUTH:

But— you did not say that, did you Carole?

It was not an absolute pleasure, no—

No— you were jealous and sly from the start.

Sly, circumspect mother superior.

Only, unlike me, you were no mother.

And in no way were you superior.

Pause.

What you in fact said was:

CAROLE:

Ant is shit broke.

And— without David he has no future.

RUTH:

Or words to that effect. Ant needed cash.

And David's new project would provide it.

Music: theme from Music While You Work. Flash of flash photography. Exit CAROLE FINDLATER. Enter two PHOTOGRAPHERS following RUTH 2 like paparazzi. RUTH poses, draping herself with a Union Jack. The men photograph her from every angle. RUTH watches.

PHOTOGRAPHER 1:

Let the flag fall.

PHOTOGRAPHER 2:

Let the flag fall, darling.

RUTH (*to* PHOTOGRAPHER 1):

There is a film in your camera, isn't there?

PHOTOGRAPHER 1:

A little more shoulder, Ruth. More leg.

PHOTOGRAPHER 2:

Please.

RUTH 2 *lets the flag fall over left shoulder. She reveals her leg. They snap away.*

PHOTOGRAPHER 2:

Please.

RUTH:

This is Britannia, not Tit-ania.

BERTHA:

Ruth took up modelling to try to make ends meet. Her ambition was always to build up a portfolio of work, to attract the attention of an agent. Then she got a part in *Lady Godiva Rides Again*.

MAURY *enters. Exit RUTH 2 with flag. The PHOTOGRAPHERS slink away.*

RUTH:

At every corner the face of a man.

Stares at me with a look of fond desire.

BERTHA:

She rubbed shoulders with the likes of Joan Collins and Diana Dors. It was a walk-on part in a British B movie, a farce about a beauty pageant. Ruth was forced to dye her hair black.

MAURY:

Another client for you, Ruth. Be good.

JACKIE:

Do you have to— *Dois tu— Dois tu le faire?*

BERTHA:

Ruth had never been so proud. It was a film, a taste of much-needed fame...

RUTH:

At every corner the face of a man

Stares at me with a look of fond desire—

Either *that*, or the gaze of a liar...

At every corner the face of a man...

And I wonder if I *know* this person—
The strange focus of this friendly fire,
At every corner the face of a man
Stares at me with a look of fond desire.

BERTHA:

Men were always after her. That was the problem. Now she was manageress.

Enter JACKIE.

RUTH:

How do I look? Tell me, how do I look?

JACKIE:

Très belle, Ruth. You always look beautiful.

BERTHA:

By then she had left George Ellis. Left him to his drink and destruction.

*BERTHA steps back into the shadows. A telephone rings.
RUTH does not answer it.*

RUTH:

He's very persistent, Jackie — Cliveden —

JACKIE:

Oh, Cliveden. It's Cliveden, or Penn it seems—

RUTH:

Penn. I could do without Penn, or Brasted.

Where we met Deborah Kerr. Miss Deborah Kerr.

A dry martini with Miss Deborah Kerr.

JACKIE:

Not Pernod?

*The telephone stops ringing. RUTH walks to the bar. Pours
herself a Pernod.*

RUTH:

You want?

JACKIE:

No.

RUTH:

The throb of cars,
The pulse of that new engine, as I wait,
The feel of that sleek paint, a touch of doom,
Faint smooch of petrol— bright distant thunder—

Enter MAURY. RUTH drinks the Pernod.

MAURY:

Everything neat and tidy, Ruth. Well done.

RUTH (*over her Pernod*):

I live in shadow but I seek the light—

JACKIE:

We aim to please.

RUTH:

Yes, we aim to please.

MAURY:

Look a bit subdued. Ruth. Take some time off.

RUTH:

The screen a shut door which may not open—

MAURY:

There'll always be doors open for you, Ruth.

RUTH:

Bedroom doors. (*She puts down her glass.*)

MAURY (*laughing*):

You ought to be in movies.

Enter DAVID BLAKELY. Handsome, callow, a certain public school arrogance. Exit JACKIE.

DAVID:

Gin and tonic, darling. When you're ready.

RUTH:

Sometimes I wish I'd stayed in Basingstoke.

MAURY:

No, *movies*, sweetheart, *movies*... (*Then to DAVID.*) Indeed, sir.

He looks at her. RUTH pours a gin and tonic.

DAVID

Behind the bar: bet place for a woman!

MAURY:

Take care of him darling.

Exit MAURY.

RUTH:

Take care of him?

I could not stand the little shit. David—

DAVID:

Come to Brands Hatch and meet the Emperor.

Music: Leroy Anderson's Blue Tango. RUTH and DAVID dance for a moment. Then embrace.

A phone rings.

DAVID breaks free, exits Music fades. ANDRÉ picks up the phone.

ANDRÉ:

Mum—

RUTH:

Who?

ANDRÉ:

Stephen. (*He puts his hands over the receiver.*) He wants you. He needs you.

RUTH:

Tell him, I'm out. Out for the evening. Gone.

ANDRÉ (*whispering to her*):

There's something very special at Cliveden.

RUTH:

I've gone to see a show. Herbert Lom.

ANDRÉ:

What?

RUTH *beckons that he put the phone down. He eventually does.*

Enter the DEFENCE COUNSEL.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Members of the jury, let me make this abundantly plain, if indeed it is not plain to you already—

ANDRÉ:

Do— do we have to listen to that man?

RUTH:

No, we don't. Don't have to listen to him.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

It cannot often happen in this court, that in a case of this importance —

RUTH:

It's not important, not important at all— André, it's time for your—

ANDRÉ:

But I'm sleeping at Berthas!

I'm staying at Grandma's now, remember?

You do remember where I am, don't you?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Desmond Edward Cussen, you have told the jury that you and this young woman were lovers for a short time in June 1954. Is that right?

RUTH:

No! Yes! Desmond and I were lovers, but—

Her daughter cries, distantly.

RUTH:

The cry at the heart of the universe.

ANDRÉ:

Georgina is hungry. She's hungry, mum.

RUTH:

I know he's hungry. I know she's hungry!

(Then, agonized.) I know she's bloody hungry. So am I!

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And that was the time Blakely was away, was it not, in Le Mans motor race, in France?

ANDRÉ:

Will there be an invasion?

RUTH:

Invasion?

You've been listening to *Journey into Space*.

ANDRÉ:

But I like it. I like monsters.

RUTH:

Monsters?

Enter PROSECUTING COUNSEL.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Do we know where Mrs Ellis acquired the gun? Do we know?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Your guess is as good as mine, Christmas. I'm only defending her. Let it not be said that I am unaware of her crime. You will not hear me breathe one word in her defence on this

regretful matter.

ANDRÉ:

What is behind that door?

RUTH:

Behind that door?

ANDRÉ:

Behind the wardrobe. The dark behind that.

The door opens slightly. A stream of light shines through. A whoosh of sound. RUTH 2 appears, standing beside the light.

RUTH:

None of us knows what is behind the door.

RUTH 2 closes the door, shutting out the light. Exit RUTH 2, ANDRÉ and the PROSECUTING COUNSEL.

Enter CAROLE FINDLATER and the JUDGE.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Mrs Carole Anne Findlater. Is that your name?

CAROLE:

Yes.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And you are a journalist and sometime sub editor of *Woman* magazine?

CAROLE:

Yes.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

On the 8th of February did the woman you know to be Mrs Ellis call at your house?

CAROLE:

She telephoned, yes.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

She telephoned? Could you be more precise?

CAROLE:

She telephoned asking for David.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And why would she ask for David? At *your* house?

JUDGE:

Is this relevant?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

I am trying to establish that, my Lord.

Enter DAVID.

DAVID (to RUTH):

Come and say hello to the Emperor.

RUTH:

I am listening to Carole's evidence.

DAVID:

Carole gave no evidence, as you know.

RUTH:

But she should have done. What were you up to?

DAVID:

She and Ant looked out for me and the car.

He repaired the car, and my life.

RUTH:

Your life!

She takes a soda siphon from the bar.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And when you betrayed Mrs Ellis, taking back her lover David Blakley for your own, the lover you had originally made love to earlier in your career, your husband was more than totally complicit in this affair?

CAROLE:

He was not particularly bothered.

But I told David Ant knew.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Told David?

CAROLE:

He said, 'Who will tune my bloody car now?'

I think Anthony had a thing for David.

Or perhaps it was the other way round.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

The other way round?

CAROLE:

David was musical as they say in show business. Ruth would have known what that meant.

RUTH:

Not true! Not true!

She squirts the soda siphon wildly and angrily towards CAROLE. Without her glasses, she misses.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

No further questions.

Exit CAROLE, slightly wet. Followed by the DEFENCE COUNSEL. RUTH puts the siphon back on the bar.

DAVID:

Come away to Penn. And meet my mother.
I know she's always wanted to meet you.

RUTH:

Always wanted to meet me? Your mother?
In your big posh house in Buckinghamshire?

DAVID:

We can drive down at the weekend and stay.
Maybe offer me five pounds for petrol?

RUTH:

And maybe a few quid for bed and board?

DAVID:

No, Mum will— Oh, *Ruth*...! It will be spiffing!

A bell begins to toll slowly, in the distance. A NUN in a black habit, Irish, truculent, enters from the shadows. DAVID exits.

RUTH:

Spiffing! We used to say that as children.
Everything was spiffing. We were spiffing.
They were spiffing. Hitler's bombs were spiffing.
The Blitz was spiffing. Spitfires in the sky
Were spiffing. Spiff, spiff! Veronica Lake
Was spiffing, blonde hair hung over one eye.
Post-war rationing is spiffing. And yes,
The Festival of Britain was spiffing,
The new Elizabethan age— it's all
Spiffing — value those Coronation mugs!

Spiffing it was and is, all of it,
All the austere deprivation of life,
The lack of jobs, the prejudice, the hate,
The back-street abortions, the National Health,
Tea and scones in a drawing room in Penn.
I'm sure you're right David, I'm sure you're right.
I'm sure it will all be very spiffing!

*RUTH turns, finding DAVID gone. She starts back,
surprised by the NUN.*

Pause.

NUN:

Root... Root, tell me—what do you know of hell?

RUTH *looks at her.*

RUTH:

Hell, sister?

NUN:

Hell, *hell!* Hell, hell, hell, hell, hell!

The four last tings. Tell me, Root. The four last tings.

RUTH:

I'm sure I don't know as much about hell

As you do, sister.

NUN:

You cannot be so sure.

It's Sister Aloysius Mc Carthy.

As a good Catholic girl you should know more.

And, in truth, it is very comforting—

RUTH:

Comforting?

NUN:

—to know God is on our side—

RUTH:

On my side? How can—? How can I know that?

*The NUN stares at her. She takes the gun slowly from
her habit.*

NUN:

Have you seen this before? Have you seen this?

RUTH is *horrified*.

Take it. You are in my prayers Take it.

RUTH *takes the gun*.

You are in my prayers, Root. The four last tings.

The NUN disappears into the shadows. RUTH puts the gun in a drawer at the bar.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL (*beginning a vocal medley*):

Ask me my verdict? — She was a bad lot.

JUDGE:

I can't see the vestige of an appeal.

CAROLE:

Siphon-squirting, eyesight-challenged daft clot!

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

It's only her pure anger which is real.

DAVID:

It's strange she does not want to visit Penn.

ANDRÉ:

I wish she stayed in more and stayed at home.

RUTH:

The same old arguments we hear again.

MAURY:

As long as there's no tendency to roam.

That would be a shame.

DAVID:

Yes.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

I state my case.

JUDGE:

I wish she'd pay attention to her hair.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

I hear it's quite the fashion round the place.

So my wife tells me.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

'Fashion to be fair...

DAVID:

Some people think the look is rather hot.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Ask me my verdict? —She's a bad lot.

Pause.

RUTH *sits down. She lights a cigarette.*

RUTH: (*intensely*):

I have a wound which bleeds and no one knows.

JUDGE:

We'll break for lunch— it's time we had a drink —

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

It's time, I know.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

It's time we had a break.

Exit PROSECUTING COUNSEL. RUTH 2 enters and stands watching.

RUTH (*intensely: smoking as she speaks*):

I have a wound which bleeds and no-one knows

The pain inside which spirals like a song:

A song that I must sing, a song I chose.

RUTH 2 *offers her a cigarette.*

The darkness present like some fetid rose

And seems so right, although I know it's wrong.

RUTH *looks at RUTH 2. She takes the cigarette.*

I have a wound which bleeds and no one knows

The reason for the troubles that life throws,

The silence in that place I've lived so long,

The song that I must sing, the song I chose.

RUTH 2 *lights up both cigarettes.*

And if love comes, and goes—and comes and goes—

His face a changing mask, not good nor strong,

I have a wound which bleeds and no one knows.

They smoke together.

RUTH:

And do I heed the rationale of those,

Accept the pain that loving will prolong?

She looks at RUTH 2.

A song that I must sing, a song I chose.

Pause.

Each morning that I wake my spirit grows
And sinks and grows as though I don't belong.

Pause.

I have a wound which bleeds and no one knows.

A song that I must sing, a song I chose.

RUTH stubs out her cigarette.

*ANDRÉ walks over to the door, tries to open it. A sliver
and a faint whoosh of light.*

RUTH 2 closes the door, shutting out the light.

RUTH (quietly):

We do not know what is behind the door.

*Enter DEFENCE COUNSEL and PROSECUTING
COUNSEL. Exit RUTH 2.*

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Desmond Edward Cussen, you have told the jury that you and this young woman were
lovers, is that right?

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

No, no, no! Not like that, Melford. Like this. (*Pause. Then affably.*) Welcome to the show,
Mr Cussen.

Enter DESMOND CUSSEN, withdrawn, taciturn.

*The DEFENCE COUNSEL brings DESMOND a chair.
DESMOND sits down. Moving the chair away from RUTH.
RUTH sits down.*

Sit down, please sit down. Welcome to the show.

There. (*Pointing to the chair.*) Welcome to the show, Mr Cussen

You had an affair with Mrs Ellis,

Am I correct?

DESMOND:

That is correct, yes.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Yes?

Blakely was away racing at Le Mans?

How long was that?

DESMOND:

Two weeks.

RUTH:

It was two weeks.

It might have been much longer, I don't know.

I must have thought Desmond would have told David.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Why?

RUTH:

To end it.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

You thought he would end it?

RUTH:

If he knew we had been intimate.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

And this was soon after your abortion?

RUTH:

Yes. It was David's child. He seemed upset.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

He seemed upset?

RUTH:

Yes. He seemed *very* upset.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Well, well, well. He knew nothing of Cussen?

DESMOND:

He knew nothing.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Were you in love with her?

DESMOND:

I was never in love.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL (*to* DESMND):

Were you jealous?

Silence. RUTH *looks a* DESMOND.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

It's all very well having an affair

But there are two children in this story.

Two children who do not deserve this fate.

I am concerned for the two children.

DESMOND *gets up and walks out. Both COUNSELS follow him.*

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Don't walk away from me! Don't walk away. (*Then raising his voice.*)

If you had more responsibility.

A tremendous stereophonic roar from a fifties motor racing track. A thunder of cars.

DAVID *enters, he embraces RUTH. A moment of shared passion. They seem happy. Then, looking over her shoulder.*

DAVID:

I know she loves me but I live in fear
Of losing that which I would call my own...

RUTH: (*looking over his shoulder*):

He knows I love him but it's very clear
The love he has is not for me alone.

More noise from the cars and cheers from the crowd. DAVID opens a champagne bottle.

DAVID:

In time, we'll buy a little house in Penn
And race that car until we chase the laps—

He pours champagne. They toast.

RUTH:

I heard the sound of smoking tyres again,
Drinking champagne from little paper cups.

Enter both COUNSELS. Exit DAVID.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

So you resumed your relationship with David Blakely.

RUTH:

Yes.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

It began again.

RUTH:

Yes.

JUDGE:

We've established that. What is your point?

DEFENCE COUNSEL

It's difficult to keep track of just *who* is sleeping with *whom*, my Lord.

JUDGE:

Permitted. How soon after his return from Le Mans, was this?

RUTH:

I cannot remember the exact date.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Something like a couple of weeks, or a month, would it be?

RUTH:

I cannot remember the exact date.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Yes, it would be.

JUDGE:

And who was it asked you to marry him?

RUTH:

David.

JUDGE:

Not Cussen? Or anyone *else* we haven't heard of?

RUTH:

No.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

How did Blakely put it? Do you remember?

RUTH:

He said we would never have any happiness if we did not get married. Words like that.

JUDGE:

Wait a minute. Could you repeat that?

RUTH:

He said, 'We will never have any happiness until we get married.'

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And he brought you a photograph?

RUTH:

Yes.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And he signed it.

RUTH:

Yes.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Did he write in your presence?

RUTH:

Yes. 'To Ruth— with all my love— David.

He hands her a photograph.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Is that the photograph?

*RUTH puts on her glasses. She looks at the photograph.
Her composure breaks: silent tears.*

My Lord, I wonder if she could sit down?

JUDGE:

Yes, certainly,

RUTH:

It is quite all right.

JUDGE:

Are you sure?

RUTH:

I do not want to sit down. (*Then, quietly.*) I do not want to sit down.

ANDRÉ enters, carrying a school satchel. He sits down.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And one night you saw marks on him— which made you do what?

RUTH:

I asked him what had happened and he said someone had bitten him on the neck while he was playing darts.

DEFENCE COUNSEL (*incredulous*):

Someone had bitten him on the neck while he was playing darts? And where did this—

RUTH:

At Old Park. Near Penn. While he was playing darts.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And what happened next?

RUTH:

I said, 'Please get out of my bed, get out of my flat, and don't come back anywhere near

me ever again'. And he left. But in the next few days he was phoning, phoning, phoning.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Phoning?

RUTH:

Yes. Eventually he came up to the flat, fell on his knees and said:

DAVID (*comes forward, falls on his knees*):

I'm sorry darling. I'm so, so sorry. Forgive me. I love you. I love you. I can prove it! Marry me.

RUTH:

I said 'I don't think your mother or family would approve.'

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And, meanwhile, while all this was going on, you were getting a divorce?

RUTH:

I was getting a divorce. From George Ellis. The decree nisi came through in December. December 1954.

DAVID *gets to his feet*.

JUDGE:

Would this be a convenient moment to adjourn?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Certainly, my Lord.

JUDGE:

Members of the jury, we will adjourn now until five minutes past two. And in the meantime, do not talk about this case to anybody or let anybody talk to you about it.

DEFENCE COUNSEL *steps back into the shadows*. ANDRÉ *takes a book from his satchel*.

ANDRÉ:

Who was talking? I thought I heard voices?

RUTH:

Distant carols on the December wind.

ANDRÉ:

I— I saw a robin in the garden.

It was unafraid, so unafraid. It —

It came close, came close and ate from my hand.

RUTH:

This is the time of the robin, piping
Its singular tune, unafraid—

ANDRÉ:

— eating—

From my hand—

RUTH:

eating from your hand —

ANDRÉ:

—eating

RUTH:

It will eat from your hand, that it *will* do.
What did you do at school?

ANDRÉ:

Were you in love?

RUTH:

In love?

ANDRÉ:

With my father: were you in love?

RUTH:

Love came sparkling in from the midnight air,
Delirious with old forgotten songs,
A dream of music from another land—

ANDRÉ:

Another land?

RUTH:

Another kinder world.

A sense of healing, much joy and rapture.

Slight pause.

Not much rapture now.

ANDRÉ:

Rapture.

DEFENCE COUNSEL (*unseen*):

And Cussen, were you still seeing Cussen? Were you still sleeping with Cussen?

ANDRÉ:

What was that noise?

RUTH:

Noise? Was there a noise?

ANDRÉ picks up his book and satchel and exits. RUTH sits in the chair. A small table with a bottle of Pernod and a glass.

RUTH 2 enters and stands silently by her. Three electronic pips.

RADIO VOICE:

This is the BBC Home Service. You have been listening to *Family Favourites*. There will now be an Interlude,

From the wireless we hear the love theme from Gershwin's 'An American in Paris'.

RUTH looks up, rapt, transfixed by the music. She stands up as if possessed.

RUTH 2 shadows her, then moves forward, as RUTH sits back down, lost in reverie. She watches as RUTH 2 dances and sways to the music.

RUTH 2 is joined by DAVID and DESMOND. All three move to the music: agonized, torn, full of erotic longing.

After two and a half minutes RUTH 2 moves back into the shadows, DAVID and DESMOND following.

RUTH stirs from her reverie and switches off the wireless.

Enter DEFENCE COUNSEL and JUDGE.

JUDGE:

Before you begin Mrs Ellis, would you keep your voice up and speak a little louder because it is very important that the jury hear what you have to say.

CHORUS (*all except RUTH 2*):

Speak up, speak out. That is the post-war dream,

A telephone rings. RUTH answers it.

RUTH:

Stephen? Stephen? I hear you've tried to call—

CHORUS:

Words you say when you're up against a wall.

RUTH:

It's not so easy as you make it seem—

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

I trust my Lord, we're ready to begin.

RUTH:

I've started modelling, been learning French.

CHORUS:

Sometimes the life we live is such a wrench.

JUDGE:

Speak up, speak out. No business staying in.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

I know, my Lord, there's nothing more to say.

CHORUS:

The dream we have is such a fragile song.

RUTH:

Don't worry Steve, I'm sure we'll get along.

ANDRÉ:

Take care. Be safe. Don't go too far away.

JUDGE:

That snap of Blakely nearly made her scream.

CHORUS:

Speak up, speak out. This is the post-war dream.

RUTH *puts the phone down*. DAVID *enters*.

RUTH:

I am going to have a child. *Your* child.

Pause.

DAVID:

Another? But you've just got rid of one.

It's like having a tooth pulled, is it not?

Like a rotten tooth which you have taken out.

RUTH:

But we can start again, David, again"

We can live in Old Park, I'll change my job!

DAVID:

No! No. Do not want that. Not want that. No.

RUTH:

Why?

He punches her suddenly in the stomach. She doubles up in pain and shock. He leaves.

She is breathless, contorted in agony. She stumbles towards a chair. She sits down. A moment.

Let me find love, O God, let me find love...

Pause.

Not like this. No, no; no, no. Not like this.

Pause.

The kind of love and care I always miss.

The sort of meaning that I'd like to have,

No pain, no hate, no fear, no cold, no grief.

Pause. She clings to the chair.

I'm tired of walking through this mad parade;

Tired of acting as though I'm not afraid.

She reaches for the phone and dials She speaks into the receiver.

Yes, I need help, / and, yes, I need it quick /

I need it now; I'm bleeding... *bleed...* / I'm sick

And tired of pandering to every whim;

Sick; tired; in pain; in need; *and now*— of him.

She gasps for breath, writhing in pain. An ambulance siren grows louder and louder.

No one is here— no. / No, I'm on my own.

The siren sounds over the last two lines.

Let me find love, O God, but not like this.

Enter MAURY.

MAURY:

He's not to come here. It's bad for business.

DAVID returns, placing a wreath of red carnations at her feet.

RUTH:

The kind of love and care I always miss.

MAURY (*warning*):

Insist if you will; it comes with a price

DAVID leaves. RUTH pours a glass of Pernod.

You're drinking more. It can't be good for you.

CHORUS:

She's still in shock, she needs a little time.

MAURY:

We'll get the shooters out, sink him in lime...

Exit MAURY. Enter JACKIE.

JACKIE:

It's true. You're drinking far too much again.

RUTH:

Jackie, you're sounding like an old French hen.

JACKIE:

If I did not look out for you, who would?

RUTH:

My mother, Bertha, if she thought she could.

But don't go mean on me, enough of that!

JACKIE:

Well, anyway, the drink will make you fat.

They laugh. JACKIE exits. RUTH puts down the Pernod. She dials. A distant phone rings.

DESMOND:

Won't answer.

RUTH puts down the phone. Dials again. Keeps ringing. ANT picks up the phone.

RUTH:

Anthony, is David with you?

ANT:

No.

RUTH:

I am very worried. He should have come—

Pause.

Do you think he is all right?

ANT

Oh, yes, yes. *(Laughing.)*

Oh, *he's* all right. *(CHORUS's laughter.)* Can I take a message?

Jazz music. More whispers and laughter.

RUTH *(hurt)*:

I hope you enjoy your Easter weekend

Because you've ruined mine. *(To DESMOND.)* He's just hung up.

She puts the phone down.

DESMOND:

You— you know where it is?

ANDRÉ:

Mum, don't go there.

RUTH *dials again. The phone rings.*

DESMOND:

He won't answer. You do know what to do?

The phone keeps ringing.

RUTH (*fury*):

Drive me there. Now. *Now!*

DESMOND:

You know where it is?

RUTH *slips on her coat, takes her handbag. The phone keeps ringing.*

PROSECUTING COUNSEL (*unseen*):

Mrs Ellis, when you fired that revolver at close range into the body of David Blakely, what did you intend to do?

RUTH:

It was obvious when I shot him I intended to kill him.

The Magdala sign illumines out of the darkness.

DAVID *emerges from the Magdala. The ringing stops. RUTH takes the gun out of her handbag. She points the gun at him.*

RUTH:

David!

He sees her, startled. She steps forward, firing three shots from the gun. A distant scream.

He falls forward. RUTH moves closer and fires two more shots into the body. Two empty clicks from the gun. Blood pools on the ground.

RUTH:

I— I remember... standing there:

Standing, as if I were someone other...

So much red, so much... so much red. I— I

Never— I have never seen so much red.

SOMEONE (*calling*):

She got him.

RUTH:

Call the police.

CHORUS:

I am the police.

RUTH *stands, as if in a dream.*

RUTH:

Call an ambulance. (*Slight pause.*) Please. (*Then, almost a whisper.*) The gun I used...

Someone takes the gun away from her.

Pause.

I am guilty. And — (*Slight pause.*) And rather confused.

Blackout.

ACT TWO: IN NIGHTMARE

A few seconds later.

DAVID is lying on the ground, a pool of blood congealing beside him. RUTH stands looking down at him, perplexed. The CHORUS is in shadows, watching. The Sword of Justice points downwards.

DAVID gets up slowly rising to his feet. RUTH is overjoyed.

RUTH:

David! Oh David!

DAVID brushes himself down. RUTH embraces him passionately. He does not respond. BERTHA appears from the shadows with a shopping bag. RUTH looks at her momentarily.

I will come to Penn.

Of course I will.

BERTHA begins to roll up the pool of blood, depositing it in her shopping bag. She exits.

DAVID (*muttering*):

A bit late for that?

RUTH:

No.

No, it's never too late. Never, never!

I always loved you, you know that. You *know*.

DAVID exits into the shadows.

You know I always loved you. You know that.

The WARDER enters.

RUTH acknowledges her, as if seeing a vision.

RUTH:

Galilee? (*RUTH looks up. Then, aside.*) For that was her name.

WARDER:

It's time.

RUTH (*blasé*):

The prosecuting counsel was Christmas,
The pub was the Magdala, the season
Was Easter, and me, well, my name was Ruth.

WARDER

It's time for you to write that letter.

RUTH:

Yes.

The Warder hands her pen and paper. RUTH sits at a small table. The WARDER exits.

As RUTH writes, so her handwriting is magnified on the wall behind her.

No doubt these last few days have been a shock to you. Please try to believe me when I say how deeply sorry I am to have caused you this unpleasantness.

CHORUS:

Unpleasantness.

RUTH:

But there were happy days—

She crosses out 'days' and writes 'times'.

CHORUS:

There were happy times and lessons to learn—

RUTH:

Please forgive him of his deceitful ways.

On Friday he left... promised to return...

She adds in 'and' between 'left' and 'promised'.

CHORUS:

Promised to return at eight but never did—

RUTH:

I want you to know how happy we have been.

Pause.

Before I hang you will know that amid

All the heartache I truly loved your son.

I shall die loving him. And *when* I die—

RUTH:

I want you to know how happy we have been.

CHORUS:

You should feel content his death has been repaid.

RUTH:

I know that I will join him— and I try—

She crosses out this last sentence.

CHORUS:

And please forgive the sadness I have made
For you: the *unpleasantness*...

RUTH:

I erase

All the sad times. For there were happy days. (*She underlines the word 'were'.*)

Pause.

Excuse my writing but the pen is shocking.

She rips up the letter. She hands pen and paper fragments to the WARDER.

Exit WARDER. Enter ANDRÉ.

ANDRÉ:

What are you writing? You don't usually write.

DEFENCE COUNSEL (*from the shadows*):

And you first met David Blakely in the Court Club, is that correct?

RUTH:

I think it was. But it was later at *The Little Club* that we—

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Not the Camera Club or the—

ANDRÉ:

What were you writing? Writing to *who*?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

The Carroll Club...? And you were drinking half a bottle of gin per day?

RUTH (*to ANDRÉ*):

I was writing to a friend, a dear friend...

ANDRÉ:

Why don't you write to me? Why not to me?

Why don't you ever write to me?

RUTH:

You have birthday cards.

ANDRÉ (*mimicking*):

You have birthday cards.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And Pernod. You were on the Pernod.

ANDRÉ:

What is Pernod? Why is he saying Pernod?

Enter BERTHA. Exit DEFENCE COUNSEL.

RUTH:

I think Bertha's coming to collect you.

She goes to ANDRÉ, leads him away.

ANDRÉ:

What is Pernod? Tell me about Pernod.

*Exit BERTHA and ANDRÉ.
Introductory piano music.*

ANDRÉ (*off stage*):

Pernod. I want to know about Pernod.

*DAVID moves from the shadows and stands, watching.
RUTH takes a position at the bar, clutching a microphone
She looks at DAVID, smiles, swaying to the rhythm, and
begins to sing.*

RUTH:

The dark is good for love

And you are too.

I know what I have,

I don't want anymore.

Time was when I was waiting

And I was waiting for a while.

Then into my life you wandered

And you made me smile—

The dark is good for love

And you are too,

I know what I have

I don't want any more.

I know what I have,

I don't want any more— No, sir!

I know what I have,

I don't want any more.

Applause. RUTH bows graciously.

DAVID (*jealousy*):

You do not sing without my permission.

RUTH:

I do not sing without your permission?

I do not need your permission to sing.

You can't tell me when and when not to sing.

A silence.

DAVID (*emphatic*):

You *cannot* sing without my permission.

'Happy Birthday' on the piano. MAURY and JACKIE wheel on a trolley with a cake flickering with candles.

JACKIE:

Happy Birthday, Ruth.

MAURY:

No one for a song?

RUTH (*to DAVID*):

And you can't tell me when to dye my hair

And when not to dye my hair.

MAURY:

Ruth? Pardon?

RUTH (*to DAVID*):

Don't tell *you* when you can race or not race.

MAURY:

Race? Living a Mercedes life is he?

I don't think so, I don't think so.

DAVID:

No.

MAURY:

Aren't you going to wish Ruth 'Happy Birthday'?

Pause.

DAVID:

Happy Birthday.

RUTH:

I attend *my* birthdays. (*Then, to Maury.*)

David never turned up for his party.

JACKIE:

Your cake will explode if you don't act soon.

RUTH *blows out the candles.*

MAURY:

Lovely. (*Slight pause.*) Hope you are being kind to our Ruth.

JACKIE (*cutting the cake*):

Slice of birthday cake, Maury? Ruth David?

MAURY (*smiling but lethal*):

Because, if you're not, we'll break your fingers

One by one, put you in a car and—

JACKIE:

Yes?

All need birthday cake?

MAURY:

And make you drive home.

DAVID *turns and leaves.* MAURY *roars with laughter.*

You could do a lot better than Blakely.

RUTH *stifles a sob.* Exit MAURY.

JACKIE: (*comforting*):

Ruth... Ruth....

RUTH:

Where he goes, I will go. (*Slight pause.*) That's it.

JACKIE *puts her arms around her.* The CHORUS *moves round them like a sheltering wing.*

CHORUS:

Access a memory of green shadows,
A cooling stream, sunlight on the water—
Shadows shimmering in a dark sweetness,
A dragonfly's wild spin, aquamarine,
Hover in that green shade, and do not leave,
Until the last drop of night dries away.

RUTH:

Where he goes, I go.

Enter DESMOND.

DESMOND:

I knew you cared.

She runs to DESMOND. *They embrace passionately.* Exit JACKIE *with trolley.*

CHORUS:

Shadows shimmering in a dark sweetness...

DESMOND:

Need a trip to the country.

RUTH:

A picnic.

Shadows, birdsong, a leafy glade.

DESMOND:

In Epping Forest. I will bring the gun

And show you?

RUTH:

Show me?

DESMOND:

Yes, I will show you.

He takes a gun from his pocket.

RUTH (*flirtatious*):

With my arthritic hand?

DESMOND:

Arthritic hand?

Her father, ARTHUR, emerges from the shadows.

ARTHUR:

Ruth, wait a moment— Come here, Ruth. Come here.

DESMOND:

We'll take the Smith and Wesson. As I said,

A woman can't be too choosy these days.

CHORUS (*whisper*):

Access a memory of green shadows,

A cooling stream, sunlight on the water—

DESMOND *points the gun at a distant target. He fires.*

RUTH:

Dad?

ARTHUR:

Wait a moment, Ruth. (*Slight pause.*) Wait... Shush... Be good.

You're a good girl, Ruth. Be good. Shush... Good... Shush...

RUTH:

Why are— Why are you doing this to me?

ARTHUR:

Wait a moment. Ruth. Here. Yes. Shush... Good. Shush...

RUTH (*agonized*):

Why on earth are you doing this to me?

Why? Why are you doing this?

She takes the gun from DESMOND.

ARTHUR:

Shush, Ruth...

RUTH:

Nooooooooooooo!

She takes the gun firmly in both hands and fires determinedly into the darkness three times.

ARTHUR falls.

DESMOND:

Not bad, Not bad.

RUTH:

Can't do it, can't do it.

CLARE ANDREA MC CALLUM steps forward with a bunch of red carnations. RUTH looks at him, takes aim and fires. The carnations erupt into petals. He falls.

DESMOND:

Improving.

RUTH:

Too shaky. I can't hold the gun.

She hands the gun back to DESMOND.

DESMOND:

If you want to, you will.

RUTH:

Too shortsighted.

DESMOND:

If you want to, you will.

RUTH:

Why I am here?

Why have you brought me here Desmond? Why?

DESMOND gives RUTH her glasses.

Why?

GEORGE ELLIS emerges from the shadows.

What?

RUTH:

DESMOND *gives her back the gun. She puts on her glasses.*

GEORGE (*hesitant*):

I am a dentist.

RUTH *takes aim firmly and fires a volley. He falls.*

DESMOND:

Now extracted.

DAVID *appears from the shadows. She aims the gun at him then gives it to DESMOND.*

She runs to DAVID, embracing him. DESMOND stands pointing the gun at both of them.

The DEFENCE COUNSEL and the JUDGE emerge from the shadows. ARTHUR, CLARE, GEORGE are swallowed up in shadow. DESMOND exits.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Did Blakely object to you living with Cussen at his flat?

RUTH:

No.

JUDGE:

I cannot hear you.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Then why did you do it?

JUDGE:

I cannot *hear* you.

RUTH (*louder*):

Because I thought it one way of breaking off my affair with David.

She squeezes DAVID's hand, looking up at him.

JUDGE:

That is better. I think if you can speak at the microphone we shall all hear.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Had there been any sexual intercourse between you and Cussen?

RUTH:

What?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Sexual intercourse.

RUTH *squeezes DAVID's hand.*

Between you and Cussen.

RUTH (*looking at DAVID*):

Desmond and I were very much in love.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

How had Blakely treated you. Be truthful and specific.

RUTH:

He was still jealous and possessive. But devoted to me.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Even though he was engaged to someone else?

RUTH:

Yes, even though he was engaged to someone else.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

To whom, precisely?

RUTH (*anxious, to DAVID*):

Who was it?

DAVID (*confiding*):

A family friend. Mary Dawson.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

There was an ongoing dispute between you, wasn't there? What happened?

RUTH:

We had fights.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Fights?

RUTH:

We had fights. Do we have to go over this?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Did you sustain any particular injury?

RUTH:

A sprained ankle.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And?

RUTH:

A black eye.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

A black eye?

RUTH:

Yes. (*Then looking at DAVID.*) A black eye, wasn't it?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And you went to the Middlesex hospital with Cussen?

RUTH *looks up at DAVID.*

RUTH:

Yes, I did. I went to the Middlesex hospital. (*Slight pause.*) But he— David only used to hit me with his fists and hands and I bruise very easily. I was full of bruises.

DAVID *embraces her lovingly.*

DAVID (*supportively*):

She always bruised very easily.

JUDGE:

Could you speak up please?

DAVID:

Pardon?

JUDGE:

Could you speak up so the jury know what you have to say.

DAVID (*louder, annoyed*):

OK. OK. ***Ruth always bruised very easily!***

CHORUS:

Hover in that green shade, and do not leave

Until the last drop of night dries away...

Enter JACKIE. Exit DEFENCE COUNSEL and JUDGE. CHORUS remains in shadows.

RADIO COMMENTATOR (*plummy voice*):_

This is the BBC Home Service.

Theme music and traffic noise from radio programme In Town Tonight. Neon brilliance: Piccadilly Circus, 1953.

DAVID *exits.*

Enter BBC RADIO COMMENTATOR.

RADIO COMMENTATOR:

Once again we silence the mighty roar of London traffic to bring to the microphone some of the interesting people who are 'In Town Tonight'.

CHORUS:

Stop!

*The music stops abruptly.
The RADIO COMMENTATOR speaks into his
Outside Broadcast microphone. Drury Lane
Theatre facade. Background of fifties traffic noises.*

RADIO COMMENTATOR:

I stand outside Drury Lane Theatre where Herbert Lom and Valerie Hobson are appearing in *The King and I*. Tell me, are you two young ladies here to see the show?

RUTH, JACKIE (*inebriated giggles*):

We are, yes.

RADIO COMMENTATOR:

And where are you up from?

RUTH, JACKIE:

Up from? (*They giggle.*) Where are we up from?

RADIO COMMENTATOR:

Yes, where are you up from? Whereabouts, exactly?

RUTH, JACKIE:

Knightsbridge. (*Suppressed giggles.*) There were three of us but David seems to have buggered off. (*More giggles.*)

RADIO COMMENTATOR (*good-hearted laughter*):

David seems to... buggered off...What? Hey? (*Puts his hand over the microphone.*)

RUTH:

With an usherette.

JACKIE:

Or peut-être Vicky Martin.

RADIO COMMENTATOR:

Peut-être ... Vicky... who?

JACKIE:

She works with us, you know.

RUTH:

No, it was the usherette.

RADIO COMMENTATOR:

So you're not exactly... (*Chuckling.*) ...'whistling a happy tune'?

RUTH:

What's there to whistle about? Why should we be whistling a fucking happy tune for that nasty little shit?

RADIO COMMENTATOR:

They do, in the show. Whistle a happy tune, that is.

RUTH:

There are no particularly happy tunes worth whistling in fifties London.

RADIO COMMENTATOR (*sniffily*):

We broadcast for family audiences The BBC prides itself / —

JACKIE:

I think we should go. He's probably sulking in the bar.

RUTH (*as JACKIE attempts to pull her away*):

You're not really interested in me,
Not really interested, are you,
Mr BBC Broadcaster with the big hat.
You're not really interested in me at all,
Are you? Are you? With your fixed neon smile,
Traffic-light walk, blue-pencilled attitude,
Scripted approach and your BBC voice,
Unctuous trousers and unctuous shoes,
You do not care if I succeed or lose,

JACKIE:

Ruth!

RADIO COMMENTATOR:

I say, steady orn...

RUTH (*rapid*):

What do you know?

Mr BBC broadcaster with the big hat.
To you I am a creature of dust and smog:
A performing shadow, just like a dog.
Unseen, invisible, unwanted wares:
Nobody bothers and nobody cares.
People like you— oh they primp and they preen:
But soon I'll be up on the silver screen!
It's worth all the effort, the effort that's made;
Even the moments I choose to get laid!
A movement of curtains, and— nothing has stirred. (*Then, laughing, she walks off.*)
It's wonderful!

RADIO COMMENTATOR:

And with those comforting thoughts we return to the studio where Miss Cliff Michelmore is

waiting to interview popular comedienne Mr Joyce Grenfell.

Music fades. Exit RADIO COMMENTATOR, JACKIE. RUTH steps back in the shadows.

CHORUS:

Thank you, London.

BERTHA:

David *had* gone off with an usherette— in between meetings with his fiancée, Mary Dawson, a girl from a well-connected Yorkshire family, and my daughter, Ruth. I don't think anyone in Penn knew of his transgressions but like Ruth, they kept sending him money. He cost her £400 in the first six months.

Enter DAVID. He steps forward.

DAVID:

What can I say? And who would believe me:
Stuck in the shadow of a famous name.
No court can hear, no judge retrieve me.
What can I say? And who would believe me?
There's no real appeal that can relieve me!
For me, for her—it's not nearly the same.

Pause. Then, quietly.

What can I say? And who would believe me?
Stuck in the shadow of a famous name.

CHORUS:

Infamous. It's like the wind....

DAVID:

Infamous...

RUTH (*stepping forward*):

But I do want people to believe you.

They hold hands, staring at each other.

If I had never loved, where would we be?
If I had never found a face so true —
But I do want people to believe you
And see the things we know are due.
That's all I want now. So... never leave me
But... I do want people to believe you,
If I had never loved where would we be?

Exit DAVID.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

What will happen to the boy?

JUDGE:

What will happen to the boy?

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Yes, what *will* happen to the boy?

The stereophonic roar of a moto racing track. ANDRÉ enters. He kneels down and pushes a small red racing car across the floor.

RUTH:

Where did you get the car? It's a nice car.

ANDRÉ:

David gave it to me for Easter. Brrmmmmmm!

The motor racing roar subsides.

I got an Easter egg and chocolate bar.

RUTH:

Oh that's nice.

ANDRÉ:

Are you going to get me some?

RUTH (*abstractedly*):

It's a dangerous game.

ANDRÉ:

What is? (Then, looking up.) What is?

RUTH:

Racing, Speed. Competing.

ANDRÉ:

Only a toy..,

I'd like to be a racing driver. Yeeeeessss!

He wheels the car furiously.

RUTH:

A racing driver? You're just a boy.

ANDRÉ (*still playing with the car*):

And Georgina's just a girl, isn't she?

How long is she staying with your sister?

RUTH:

David has asked me to marry him. (*Slight pause.*) Right?

ANDRE looks up, stops what he is doing.

ANDRÉ (*expressionless; looking directly at his mother*):

Love came sparkling in from the midnight air...

The telephone rings. He walks towards it.

RUTH:

Do not answer it. (*He continues walking. Then, furious:*) DO NOT ANSWER IT! He stops.

ANDRÉ (*muttering*):

Popular...

Music: 'Sleepy Lagoon; theme from Desert Island Discs.

ANDRÉ *exits with toy car.*

Enter JACKIE.

RUTH (*to JACKIE*):

Welcome to Ellis island.

JACKIE *and RUTH hug.*

JACKIE: (*quietly*):

You've seen a priest?

RUTH:

Yes, yes, I've seen a priest.

He looks at me and I— I look at him.

They laugh. Music fades.

JACKIE:

Is the food good?

RUTH:

The food is not that bad.

And the books, well, they are books. (*A little laugh.*) No discs though. (*They both laugh.*)
Dead Reckoning. The Lady Gives It Back... (*Laughs,*)

But they are kind, so very, very kind.

Pause.

It's a long time since I felt such kindness.

It *is* Holloway, it's not Hollywood...

Awkward laughter from both. Pause.

Somebody is sending red carnations.

JACKIE (*incredulously*):

Who would *do* that?

RUTH:

No message.

JACKIE (*very quietly*):

Sans message.

RUTH:

And the warder keeps telling me 'It's time'.

'Ruth, it's time you did this, time you did that...'

JACKIE:

I've written to the Home Office.

RUTH:

Please, *don't*.

I've instructed Bickford not to appeal.

Although he says to think of the children.

JACKIE

But, Ruth!

RUTH:

No appeal. 'An eye for an eye'...

'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.'

JACKIE (*horrified*):

But— you're a woman. Think—think

Of your children. Listen to Bickford.

RUTH:

No.

I can't Jackie (*Agonised; almost in tears.*) ***I can't make an appeal!***

A shaft of light and a whoosh of sound. RUTH 2 enters.

JACKIE:

Nobody wants you dead Ruth. Nobody.

There— there are *fifty thousand petitions*.

You children need to know that you're alive!

RUTH:

Alive. (*Then, to RUTH 2.*) *I almost forgot about you.*

JACKIE:

Forgot?

RUTH:

You're here when least expected.

JACKIE:

What? (*Then, puzzled.*)

What happened to the dream?

RUTH 2 stands beside RUTH.

RUTH:

Dream? What dream?

RUTH 2:

What?

RUTH:

I have lived too long in dreams.

The light increases in intensity. Then extinguishes. Exit RUTH 2. Enter MAURY.

MAURY:

It won't do.

It won't do, Ruth. It won't do.

RUTH:

But my job—

Why take away my job?

MAURY:

Why? *Why?* Why not?

Never ask *why*, Ruth.

RUTH (*desperate*):

But Maury, *Maury!*

Exit MAURY.

The telephone rings.

RUTH (*shouting at the phone*):

Go away, can't you!

JACKIE goes to answer it.

Don't answer it, please!

My life stitched up with telephone calls!

The phone stops ringing.

It's probably David, telling more lies.

Where is he? Not at the Rodney hotel,

That's for sure. Not at the Rodney hotel

With me. He's with that Findlater woman.

JACKIE:

You don't know!

RUTH:

I do know! I need a drink.

Can you pour me one, Jackie? The Pernod.

JACKIE *goes to the bar.*

There is a fresh lemon in the drawer.

JACKIE *opens the drawer. Takes out an air pistol.*

JACKIE:

Fresh lemon? And — (*Holds up an automatic.*) — guns.

RUTH:

Guns? (*Pause.*) I am the gun.

Music: Blue Tango by Leroy Anderson.

The CHORUS moves and behaves as at a drunken party.

Enter DEFENCE COUNSEL, PROSECUTING COUNSEL, and the JUDGE. RUTH is sitting on a chair, DAVID on another. The music fades.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And on the Good Friday April 8, 1955, you were looking forward to David returning home. But he did not, did he?

RUTH (*to DAVID*):

You could have phoned. Why didn't you phone me?

DAVID:

Do you think I carry a phone? Do you?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

And you suspected he was with Carole Findlater.

RUTH:

I had every reason to believe he was.

Enter CAROLE, angry, pointing, gesticulating.

CAROLE:

No, no, no! Was he with me? No, no, no!

David was with us! There *is* a difference!

Ha! —A difference! Ha! There is a difference!

We were planning the next Goodwood meeting!

We were planning on winning the Goodwood cup.

Cars? *Racing cars?* The *Emperor?* Savvy?

RUTH:

He was with you darling, stroking your tits.

CAROLE:

Rather me than a tart like you.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Ladies!

PROSECUTING COUNSEL (*warmly*):

Welcome to the show, Mrs Findlater.

CAROLE (*beaming smile, bright tone*):

Hello, Christmas. Pleased to meet you.

They shake hands.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Sit down.

CAROLE *sits on a chair, dragging it away from RUTH.*

And — and — where was I?

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Emperor.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Emperor?

RUTH:

Said they were planning Goodwood,

But the Emperor had seen better days.

It was clapped out. Like someone we all know.

CAROLE (*lightly*):

Clap your arse.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Pardon?

RUTH:

There!

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

What?

RUTH:

You heard that?

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

And all this happened on the Good Friday?

DAVID:

Correct. It happened on the Good Friday.

I'd been invited in for drinks.

RUTH (*scornfully*):

Drinks!

JUDGE:

Drinks?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

You were invited in for drinks?

CAROLE:

Not her.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Why can't you talk to each other

In a civilised way, not trade insults?

RUTH:

She's lying.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

We don't use lie detectors

In a British court. Until then —

CAROLE

You see.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Well, well, well.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Why— why are you so angry—?

RUTH:

You've only her word for it. Ask Desmond.

CAROLE:

Your alternative lover. He would know,

Wouldn't he.

RUTH *jumps up, very angry, but is cautioned by a MINDER.*

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Why — why are you so angry

Mrs Ellis? You yourself were conducting —

CAROLE:

Exactly!

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

— an alternative affair —

DAVID:

Yeah, why? Say *I'm* angry; why *you* angry?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

... with Mr Cussen...

RUTH:

It wasn't like that! /

CAROLE:

Smashed his car windows /

RUTH:

It wasn't like that. /

DAVID:

Smashed in my Vanguard windows. Why?

RUTH (*indifferent*):

Why?

CAROLE:

See.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

And you went further...

RUTH:

I went further? How?

CAROLE:

A conniving little minx, she would — /

DAVID:

Why —

Why you push in my flipping windows? / What?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

What was in your mind—

RUTH (*to DAVID*):

Why not invite me?

Why didn't you invite me?

DAVID:

Ask Ant that,

Ask Ant. They gave out the invitations.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Mrs Ellis, what did you think at the time?

JUDGE:

Is this relevant?

DEFENCE; PROSECUTING:

We think so, my Lord.

RUTH:

He was having it off with the Nanny.
Or so they wanted me to imagine.

JUDGE:

A party went on at Tanza Road. (*Then, to RUTH.*) And —
A party went on at Tanza Road. You —
You heard voices? Heard the sound of voices?

RUTH:

I heard David's voice.

JUDGE:

And a female voice?

RUTH:

Laughing, giggling. (*Looks at CAROLE.*) I had an idea —

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Yes?

JUDGE:

Speak louder.

RUTH:

— it was someone I knew.

PROSECUTING COUNSEL:

Mrs Ellis, what did you have in mind
When you took the gun out of your handbag?

RUTH:

I had the peculiar idea—

*CAROLE gets up suddenly and walks out, followed by
DAVID.*

*They in turn, are followed by the PROSECUTING
COUNSEL. A telephone rings.*

JUDGE (*world-weary*):

You may answer the call, Mrs Ellis.
Don't mind me.

RUTH answers the call. She listens carefully.

RUTH:

No.

She puts the phone down.

JUDGE (*weak smile*):

Happy?

Exit JUDGE.

Music: Moonlight Serenade by Glenn Miller.

ANDRÉ enters carrying a red carnation. RUTH takes the carnation and gives him kiss. *Music fades.*

ANDRÉ:

Goodbye.

RUTH:

André.....!

A sudden sharp sound of nuts cracking. A MAN cries out in pain offstage. RUTH and ANDRÉ turn to look.

MAURY:

He's a marvel with the nutcrackers.

ANDRÉ:

Nut-crackers?

Nuts cracking. Muffled scream.

RUTH (*quietly*):

Andre, it's time for bed.

CHORUS (*quickly*):

The dark is nicer than the light anytime:

A place of subversion and good for crime.

Listen to our story, it's true, no pap:

If you want to stay in business, don't take the rap.

MAURY (*off-stage*):

If you want to stay in business, don't take the rap.

More nuts cracking. Another scream.

ANDRÉ:

What was that. Mum? Why is that man screaming?

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

You had the peculiar idea....?

RUTH:

I had the peculiar idea

I wanted to kill him.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

You had what?

RUTH (*quietly*):

I —

Had an idea I wanted to kill him.

NUN (*off-stage; gently*):

Tell me, Root, what do you know of hell?

Silence.

DEFENCE COUNSEL:

Why —

Why did you do it?

RUTH:

I — I was upset. (*Slight pause.*)

André, please go to bed like a good boy.

ANDRÉ *exits, reluctantly, turning back once or twice.*

JUDGE:

You do not know *why* you wanted to kill him?

You do not know why you wanted to kill him?

RUTH:

No. (*Slight pause.*) I was very upset. (*Then, angrily.*) Do not know.

Silence.

JUDGE:

I think the court must adjourn for a while. (*Slight pause.*) Resume nearer the time.

Exit JUDGE, DEFENCE COUNSEL and PROSECUTING COUNSEL.

RUTH (*crushed*):

Nearer the time. Resume nearer the time...

Electronic music: 'Journey into Space' as from a fifties radio.
ANDRÉ *enters, sits listening.*

CHORUS (*echo chamber, as music fades*):

Journey — into — Space

ANDRÉ (*deep concern*):

All systems check. All systems check. Roger.

Over and out. Over and out.

RUTH *taps out a single note on the piano.*

Stand by for blast off. Stand by for blast off.

Mayday. Mayday. Mayday. Mayday. Mayday.

She picks out a tune on the piano.

RUTH (*singing*):

'I've never been in love... No, never not at all...'

She stops fingering the keyboard and breaks down into sudden heartfelt tears.

ANDRÉ *comforts her, puzzled, his arm round her.*

CHORUS (*rapid, furious whisper*):

Journey into darkness, that last quick run:

Under the shadow of a bright black sun.

Faster and faster, for there is no map:

If you want to stay in business, don't take the rap.

ANDRÉ:

If you want to stay in business, don't take the rap.

RUTH (*helpless*):

I— I — what? What have I done, André? What?

Pause.

A shaft of light as if from an opened door. A whoosh of sound. DAVID stands silhouetted in the shaft of light. Ethereal music.

RUTH *walks towards the light. ANDRÉ watches.*

The CHORUS surrounds ANDRÉ. He rises in the air, floating away from RUTH.

RUTH (*looking toward DAVID*):

Where you go, I will go.

DAVID *holds out his hands to RUTH. ANDRE floats further away into the darkness.*

CHORUS (*quietly*):

Where you go, I —

RUTH (*impassioned, into herself*):

This moment is a give and take of time:

I cannot move and yet I am not still.

My heart is beating like a water-mill

In that green silence. Is it then a crime

To stay in this pure world, in this bright field,

In love with love and longing for the light?

And does this longing serve to make it right?

Does this green silence serve to make it healed?

I know my actions serve to make it wrong:
I know that now. I know the place right here.
I know the place and know there is no fear,
All will be well. That simple, simple song
That my soul sings is like an April flower,
Turning like April in this green-black hour.

Enter JOHN BICKFORD. The shaft of light dims out. Exit DAVID.

BICKFORD:

You must appeal. We'll make a better case.

RUTH:

I can't do that.

BICKFORD:

But you must appeal!

You deserve more than one a half days.

RUTH:

I can't do that Mr Bickford, can't do... /

BICKFORD:

/ Make a new statement.— *Did you get it right?*

Did it really happen that way? You sure?—

Mishcon's left instructions. Restore the facts.

You owe it to your family now, Ruth.

A telephone rings. RUTH answers it.

I've told you **No**. / I've told you *No*, Stephen. /

(Laughing). But... / Why I am not convinced? / Tell me... / No,

I don't *want* to meet Valerie Hobson.

She laughs and puts the phone down.

Who is Valerie Hobson, anyway?

BICKFORD:

I quite enjoyed it.

RUTH:

That was Mr Ward.

BICKFORD:

Quite enjoyed the show.

RUTH:

It wasn't bad.

BICKFORD:

No.

RUTH:

But not a patch on Gertrude Lawrence.

BICKFORD:

No.

RUTH:

Gertie always sang a little off-key.

BICKFORD:

Old school. It's a shame she's no longer with us.

Did Cussen give you the gun?

RUTH:

A one-off.

I wanted to be like Gertrude Lawrence.

She danced on the London pavements you know.

Before the war. Long before the war.

BICKFORD:

Yes.

RUTH:

An East End girl. Not like me. Rhyl, North Wales.

She had talent, real talent. Clever clogs.

BICKFORD:

I once saw her in *Lady in the Dark*.

RUTH:

Saw Gertrude Lawrence? *Lady in the Dark*?

BICKFORD:

Kurt Weill and — (*Then, almost a whisper.*) Did Cussen give you the gun?

RUTH (*agonised*):

There is no reprieve. *There is no reprieve....!*

BICKFORD:

This isn't the finish of everything.

RUTH:

You've been taking money from Cussen.

BICKFORD:

No!

RUTH:

So he goes free and I go down.

BICKFORD:

No, no!

RUTH *walks away*. BICKFORD *exits*.

CHORUS:

Access a memory of green shadows,

A cooling stream. Sunlight on the water —

RUTH *sits down*.

She takes a lipstick and a powder compact out of her make-up box. She puts on the lipstick carefully, pursing her lips. As she opens the compact to look in the mirror there is a tinkling rendering of 'I've never been in love'.

VICTOR MISHCON *enters*.

As she finishes applying her make-up the tune winds down.

MISHCON:

You got rid of Bickford. He meant well.

RUTH:

I am not asking for favours.

MISHCON:

Yes.

RUTH:

Mr Mishcon, I am perfectly fine.

I am composed, in a good mood, and calm.

I've applied my make-up, can face the world.

I have never felt better in my life.

MISHCON:

What if your son found out from the Press —

Only knew the crude newspaper versions?

Would you want him to be happy with that?

RUTH:

It is *traitorous* to cause trouble for —

MISHCON:

/ Tell me what really happened. Tell me now.

He looks at the WARDER who comes and stands next to him.

Music: Gershwin. RUTH moves forward, swaying in time to

the music.

A whoosh of light as if through an opened door. RUTH 2 appears, fractured in the light.

Exit MISHCON and WARDER.

RUTH and RUTH 2 embrace and dance together slowly to the music: intimate, safe, full of élan.

The music fades but the two RUTHS still dance.

CHORUS:

There is a time for dancing in the light.

Interrupting their dance, DESMOND appears from the shadows with a Smith and Wesson automatic.

He stops, pins the barrel, then holds the gun out to them both. RUTH parts from RUTH 2 who stands to one side RUTH 2 steps forwards and takes the gun.

RUTH (*looking round with wonder*) :

The slow enchantment of this lighted space.

*Exit RUTH 2, with gin.
Silence. RUTH is bathed in a sea of light.*

CHORUS:

There is a time for dancing in the light.

Only the heart will know the time is right.

Only the place enchants as well it might:

There is a time for dancing in the light.

Enter MAURY.

MAURY (*insinuating*):

The dark is better than the light any time:

A place for brutality and good for crime.

Listen to my story, it's true, no crap:

If you want to say in business, don't take the rap.

CHORUS:

If you want to stay in business, don't take the rap.

Enter ANDRÉ.

ANDRÉ:

Still here?

RUTH:

Yes, I'm still here. (*Slight pause Then, ruefully.*) I'm still here.

DAVID (*calling out; unseen*):

Ruth!

Pause.

RUTH and ANDRÉ *cling to each other*. GEORGINA *cries in the distance*. *The light darkens.*

MAURY:

If you're thinking of survival, no dice.
The bogey man will follow you: on ice.
It's never worth complaining, poor sap.
If you want to stay in business, don't take the rap.

CHORUS:

If you want to stay I business, don't take the rap.

Enter DESMOND.

DESMOND:

It's never what it looks like, and I know.
Someone has to learn their lesson— and go.
It's a fifties situation— on tap.
If you want to stay in business: don't take the rap.

ANDRÉ:

Mind the gap!

CHORUS:

It's a trap!

MAURY(*basso profundo*):

Don't take the rap!

Exit MAURY.

DESMOND (*gently to* RUTH):

It's never what it looks like. And I know.

A distant phone ringing.

DESMOND (*to* RUTH):

Won't answer.

RUTH (*clutching* ANDRÉ *and calling out*):

Ant.... Ant.... Is... Is... Is Da...vid...?

Is David...? (*Looking round wildly, angrily.*) Andrea? Dad? George? **Maury?**

DESMOND:

Won't answer. You— you— you know what to do?

RUTH (*anguished*):

I.... What....? Who...?

*The Magdala sign illumines out of darkness. Exit
ANDRÉ.*

RUTH 2 comes forward with the Smith and Wesson.

DESMOND:

You know what to do?

*DAVID emerges from the Magdala. The ringing stops. RUTH
takes the gun from RUTH 2.*

RUTH:

David!

*DAVID sees her, pauses. She fires repeatedly at him. He
falls to the ground. She stands over the body and fires again.
Two empty clicks from the gun.*

Silence.

*RUTH stands transfixed, as if in a dream. RUTH 2 and
DESMOND watching.*

Silence.

CHORUS (*gently, almost a whisper*):

We must walk carefully towards that light.

Someone takes the gun from her.

No step too far, no hurrying or pain

To slow our movements. It will be all right

To shed a tear: at least that will be plain.

The CHORUS move forward looking down at DAVID.

No step too fast, no hurrying or pain,

No backward look, nor time to say goodbye.

To shed a tear: at least that will be plain.

It is serene and clear: this moment I.

As they obscure him, DAVID exits They look towards RUTH.

No backward look or time to say goodbye;

The darkness present like an open door.

To shed a tear... At least that will be plain.

And there's no sense in wanting more

A noose descends out of the darkness.

The darkness present like an open door
To slow our movements. It will be all right
To pause for prayer a little while before.

JACKIE *emerges from the shadows: stands, watching.*
RUTH 2 *exits with* DESMOND.

We must walk carefully towards that light.

Jackie!
RUTH:

She runs towards JACKIE. *They embrace.*

JACKIE:
I did what I could. (*Slight pause.*) But... the man
Was at Ascot and could not be disturbed.

RUTH (*together with* JACKIE):
That's torn it!

They laugh. A few stifled tears.

Her parents appear, BERTHA carrying a shawl - wrapped GEORGINA, *followed by* ANDRÉ. *Exit* JACKIE.

They stand looking at each other in silence.

The CHAPLIN *watches from the shadows.*

The WARDER *comes forward with a large bouquet of red carnations. She stands before* RUTH.

WARDER:
There is —

CHAPLAIN:
There is no message.

The CHAPLAIN *indicates that the* WARDER *take the bouquet away. Exit* WARDER *with red carnations.*

Her parents turn and leave. ANDRÉ clings to RUTH. *He lingers a little, then walks off towards his grandparents.*

Silence.

RUTH *kneels down. The* CHAPLAIN *takes a wafer from a gold pyx.*

CHAPLAIN:

Behold the One in whom all things are made:

The beating heart, the pulsing breath.

In the dark of Love be not afraid:

There is new life, an end to death.

The CHAPLAIN gives RUTH communion on the tongue.

Mark now the Peace wherein all grief may rest.

In the dark of Love be not afraid.

May your soul find healing and be blessed.

Behold the One in whom all things are made.

Pause.

The CHAPLAIN leaves. In the distance, through an opened door, faint music.

RUTH turns towards the music. The door suddenly closes with a muffled clang, shutting off the sound.

ANDRÉ runs forward. He reaches upwards towards the noose.

RUTH:

No!

The PROSECUTING COUNSEL gently leads ANDRÉ back into the shadows.

Enter PIERREPOINT, followed by his ASSISTANT and the WARDER.

PIERREPOINT:

Follow me.

RUTH hesitates. He puts his arms round her.

I'm not going to hurt you.

RUTH follows PIERREPOINT. She stands below the noose. RUTH takes off her glasses and hands them to the WARDER.

RUTH:

I will not be needing these anymore.

Exit WARDER, with glasses.

The ASSISTANT binds her feet and hands. PIERREPOINT places the noose around her neck. A covering is put over her

head.

Silence.

With a stereophonic roar a blinding light speeds upwards and darkness spreads downwards. The Sword of Justice plummets, skewering the stage with a massive thud.

Blackout.

Lights up on a silvered director's chair bearing the words RUTH ELLIS.

RUTH enters, all early nineteen-fifties glamour in flowing white gown and stole. She smokes a cigarette from a long-handled holder.

Sitting down, she crosses her legs elegantly and looks steadily out towards the audience. She blows a smoke ring.

RUTH:

That was one version of my life, no doubt.

A piercing gaze.

Still a lot people don't know about.

A rope jerks taut.

Blackout.

Appendix 2: Practice-As-Research Play

SERVANTS

by Christopher O'Shaughnessy

CHARACTERS

Virginia Woolf

Millie

Leonard Woolf

A magnified, smudged, hand-written recipe for Boeuf en Daube as a back projection.

A tall lectern/writing desk. Chairs. A table. A small Bakelite radio, a wind-up gramophone, a Remington typewriter, some typing paper, a large exercise book, a fountain pen, a box of cigars, a Victorian chiming clock, some books and an ancient telephone.

A cloak-stand with a coat, a large floppy hat, an over-sized cardigan with deep pockets, and a walking stick.

VIRGINIA, MILLIE.

Silence.

MILLIE:

I quit.

Pause. VIRGINIA looks at her.

I can't continue doing for you in the manner to which you have become accustomed.

Pause. VIRGINIA stares at her.

And, besides, I seem to have no time for what really interests me. Always cooking and cleaning, washing and scrubbing, sweeping floors, making fires, leading the grate, popping out for this and that.

Pause. VIRGINIA seems deep in thought.

It's best for me to leave, seek pastures new— as they say— Mrs Woolf.

Pause.

VIRGINIA:

You know how much Leonard and I have come to depend on you.

MILLIE:

I can't help that. Mr Laughton and his wife Miss Elsa have made overtures. Not to mention Mr Olivier and Miss Vivien Leigh.

VIRGINIA:

Millie—

MILLIE:

It's too late.

VIRGINIA:

But you —

MILLIE:

As I said, I quit.

Pause.

VIRGINIA:

Somewhere around 1910 the world changed. And it started with the servant.

MILLIE:

Pardon, Ma'am?

VIRGINIA:

We might be able to raise your wages by three shillings.

MILLIE:

But will it be enough for me to purchase a Remington typewriter? And, occasionally, I'd like a little time to listen to the Bakelite radio in my room. And now and then, write a little.

VIRGINIA:

Write a little. Have you ambitions to become a novelist, Millie?

MILLIE:

Not like you, Miss. But we in the click always say that we need to enjoy our time off. What we have of it.

Pause.

*A flickering image of a fairground at Hampstead Heath.
Distant fairground music.*

VIRGINIA:

How much are we paying you?

MILLIE:

Four pounds and five pence a month, Mrs Woolf. As you must know. And I can't barely manage on it. Especially if I wants to go to Hampstead Heath. With other members of the click.

VIRGINIA:

Hampstead Heath?

MILLIE:

Hampstead Heath, with the fair and the toffee apples. We goes there. A lot. When it's on.

VIRGINIA:

Why?

MILLIE:

We goes there. The click and that. We goes on the rides and eats the candy floss. When we have what little time off we have. You've heard of... candy floss.

VIRGINIA:

And toffee apples.

MILLIE:

We can't all go to the library for a holiday like you do, Mrs Woolf. No disrespect.

VIRGINIA:

If you were more careful with money—

MILLIE:

It ain't enough. It just ain't enough. Four pounds and five pence a month just ain't enough.

VIRGINIA:

But you have the run of the house, we don't stand on ceremony, you don't wear a uniform, meals are included, you have your own room, and there are frequent hot baths—

MILLIE:

If I light the kitchener to have them, Miss. If I cook the food, we eat. If I don't cook the food, we starve. You never learned to cook in your life, did you? Isn't it about time you did?

VIRGINIA:

You know how deeply and unutterably fond we are of you.

MILLIE:

An isn't it about time you and Mr Woolf learned how to open the front door to guests without expecting me to do it.

VIRGINIA:

What?

MILLIE:

If I don't open the front door the guests go away thinking you are not at home.

Background image and music fade. The doorbell rings.

Pause.

VIRGINIA:

Well?

A Sussex downs landscape. Birdsong.

MILLIE goes out.

VIRGINIA (*transfixed; gazing into the middle distance*):

The door opens. The tiger leaps. (*Pause. Then, rapid change of tone to the audience.*) What is it about the narrow servant mind which I find so entirely perplexing? Incessant complaints, inexorable griping and whingeing, and for what? Our servants are treated better than most. Perhaps we are too familiar, too kind, too democratic; perhaps we've made welcome a species which should have been kept carefully at arm's length—

MILLIE *returns*.

I shouldn't be answering doors.

Doorbell rings again. VIRGINIA goes out.

MILLIE:

It ain't that I don't appreciate the set up. No, I don't wear a uniform and that. And they is nice to me. They is nice. A bit freakish if you like, Mr and Mrs Woolf, especially when they rides along with their hats on them rickety old bicycles, but nice. It's just that—well—why—why—I'm waiting on someone who spends most of her life in a dream, who only ever seems to come alive when she's scribbling in a book! Scribbling in a frigging book— or at that writing desk—over there.

Her ladyship stands bolt-up straight, at that desk, smoking a cigar or a cigarette from a long-handled holder as if she is in a frigging dream, looking out, at I don't know what, into nothing at all, and writing... Well I wish I had time to stand for hours on end gazing into the middle distance and writing whatever comes into me head. It's not that I'm ungrateful. Somebody must like what she does. And they pays her money, don't they. And then she pays me.

A door slams. Enter VIRGINIA.

VIRGINIA:

How about a five shilling pay rise?

MILLIE:

It isn't about the pay rise.

VIRGINIA:

Not about the pay rise?

MILLIE:

No.

VIRGINIA:

Then— What is it about?

Millie sits down on a chair.

MILLIE:

I can't be doing with it all, Ma'am. Can't be expected to give up my only day off when you have unexpected guests.

VIRGINIA:

But you get paid in lieu.

MILLIE:

Didn't you write somewhere that a woman needs five hundred pounds a year and a

room of her own—?

VIRGINIA:

If she is to find the time to write fiction, yes.

MILLIE:

Yes. Well. Why.... Why can't I—I've got a room of my own— and I'd like to— I'd like to— do—something different—with my life.

VIRGINIA:

Something different?

MILLIE:

What's so important about writing fiction?

Pause.

VIRGINIA:

How the poor philistine mind prattles on down its own cul de sac. What damp souls these housemaids have. And yet it's a question I ask myself continually. It's a question I always ask myself. What is important about writing fiction? What is so important? (*Then to MILLIE.*) But you don't have five hundred pounds a year, Millie, you have fifty pounds a year at the most and the room isn't yours, it's ours— It's only yours while you are employed by us.

MILLIE (*sudden aggression*):

Why are you a slave to that writing desk?

VIRGINIA:

A slave?

MILLIE:

A slave to your book and your pen and your cigarettes. And how does Mr Woolf put up with it all?

VIRGINIA:

You come close to overstepping the mark sometimes.

MILLIE:

There's hardly a moment when you are not writing. What drives you, Ma'am? What is it that drives you? Is it healthy? Is it really healthy? Who's in charge? Who's actually in charge? I know you had your problems and that's why I cook good dishes for the pair of you — to nourish and sustain — but I often think this fiction business ain't good for the both of you.

VIRGINIA:

I do do other things, you know. I write reviews, essays, short stories, keep quite an extensive diary...

MILLIE:

I'd like to keep a diary but you works me so hard I is exhausted by the time I goes to bed. (*Slight pause.*) Who was that anyway?

VIRGINIA:

People who witness by the name of Jehovah. And you know what I think of that.

MILLIE *laughs*.

That's all you need, Miss, ain't it. What with me quitting and you wondering where the next meal's coming from —

She laughs again.

VIRGINIA:

This is the seventh time you've handed in your notice within three months. I am not of the opinion that there is a degree of humour in this situation.

MILLIE:

We are not amused then, are we?

VIRGINIA:

We are not — (*Then, hurriedly.*) As I said, Leonard and I are inordinately fond of you— and we'd hate to see you go—but if you must—

MILLIE:

I suppose I could see how I went on an extra five shillings.

VIRGINIA:

I thought we said three.

MILLIE:

There we go again: mean old bugger. Five it was and no mistake And do put that in writing, Ma'am. I'd hate to leave you to your own devices. (*She turns, sniffing the air.*) Better go and check on that *boeuf en daube*.

She goes out.

VIRGINIA:

Why we have servants, I can't think.

A seascape with falling waves. A clock chimes.

She looked steadily at life and— well — it looked steadily back at her. There were silences and awkward ransoming moments when a sort of transaction took place. She was on one side and life was on the other. And she was always trying to get the better of it, as it was of her. A depth of silence seemed to say: 'Hold still, hold fast to that which matters—hold still amid the endless discourse'. And sometimes life itself was triumphant, and sometimes she. There were a great many reconciliation scenes.

But how on earth am I to be reconciled with Millie? Is that what she wants? And does

she herself know what she wants?

Am I to treat her like a celebrity? The world changed radically in December 1910. Is it to change even more radically in December 1931? She goes on holiday with us— to France, Spain, Italy. And when she *doesn't* we send her postcards from abroad. (*Slight pause.*) Is that what the book might be called: 'Postcards from Abroad'? Poor Millie can barely write her name, let alone write 50,000 coherent words.

She sits down and turn on the radio. We hear a blast of Turkey Trot ragtime music. She listens for a moment then gets up. She flaps her arms, turkey-like, strutting around slowly, dancing to the music.

Enter MILLIE. She stands staring in amazement at VIRGINIA, ladle in one hand. She turns off the music.

MILLIE:

You listening to my radio?

VIRGINIA:

We don't have our own and of course we're more than grateful for the opportunity.

MILLIE:

What that you doing?

VIRGINIA:

Just a little dance Mr Eliot taught us.

MILLIE:

Oh.

She goes out. VIRGINIA picks up in silence some of the strutting, flapping movements. In the background, stormy waves crash against rocks. VIRGINIA stands still.

VIRGINIA:

It is perhaps a dance Millie should be doing, not me. I don't know why Tom ever taught it to us. The same person who wrote *The Waste Land* taught us the Turkey Trot! But then he did write *Sweeney Agonistes* and Tom needs a displacement activity, as do we all. Human kind cannot bear too much reality and the ridiculous Turkey Trot will suffice as any other. I feel for his despair and his misery. I feel for them both, for both he and Viv. I share his anger at the inadequacy of the doctors. Their lack of perception, their inability to arrive at a viable diagnosis. Apart from the total lack of value for money! His wife's mental suffering, her continual anguish, the unenviable and bewildering state of her not ever knowing what is wrong. And Tom's forbearance, so difficult to quantify. How does

one quantify and evaluate something which is unseen and unwitnessed? (*Slight pause.*)
How I value Leonard.

A gong sounds repeatedly.

Millie, we strike the gong once!

The sound stops. Enter MILLIE.

MILLIE:

I didn't strike the gong at all, Ma'am. We've got a little time yet.

VIRGINIA:

I distinctly heard you. Repeatedly striking the gong.

MILLIE:

Why would I do that? Now why would I do that?

She goes out.

VIRGINIA stands in silence then walks towards her typewriter. The sound of birdsong rises, distorted, shrill, strange. She sits by her typewriter.

Silence.

She pulls a typed page from the roller.

VIRGINIA (reading from the page; recorded voice):

Here, in the few minutes that remain, I must record, heaven be praised, the end of *The Waves*. I wrote the words *O Death* fifteen minutes ago, having reeled across the last ten pages with some moments of such intensity and intoxication that I seemed only to stumble after my own voice, or almost, after some sort of speaker (as when I was mad). I was almost afraid, remembering the voices that used to fly ahead. Anyhow it is done; and I have been sitting here these fifteen minutes in a state of glory, and calm, and some tears, thinking of Thoby and if I could write Julian Thoby Stephen 1881-1906 on the first page.

Slight pause. VIRGINIA, now speaking in her own live voice.

How physical the sense of triumph and relief is!

More sounds of the gong, beating slowly.

Millie, stop banging that thing! You know we seldom use it! (*Shouting.*) Leonard, *tell her!*

Enter MILLIE. The gong continues banging very slowly.

MILLIE (*indignant*):

It's not me banging anything.

VIRGINIA *looks terrified for a moment*. VIRGINIA:

Leonard?

MILLIE:

Mr Woolf is in the garden. I can't hear nothing and I'm sure he can't.

VIRGINIA *walks towards MILLIE. She reaches out towards her in a helpless gesture.*

MILLIE:

It might be best if you lie down. Lie down quietly upstairs. I'll fetch Mr Leonard.

VIRGINIA *clutches her head, sitting on the chair. The sound stops.*

VIRGINIA:

I'm tired, exhausted. It's the end of a book, this book. (*Beat.*) *The Waves*. Must wrap my brain in green dock-leaves for a day.

MILLIE:

I'm not sure we got any dock-leaves. Mr Woolf's been at the weeds like a tartar this morning.

VIRGINIA:

I'll lie down. I will go upstairs for a while.

VIRGINIA *goes out. MILLIE stares after her. She stands looking at her watch.*

Pause.

The sound of a flushing toilet. MILLIE stops looking at her watch. She sits down.

MILLIE (*to the audience; incredulous*):

Mrs Woolf is the only person I know who flushes the toilet *before* she uses it. But that, of course, is because the toilet here is a frigging novelty. It's so much a frigging novelty that she and Mr Woolf seem to want to go and flush it—not *use* it, mind—every time they goes upstairs. Up to fetch a book—jangle/flush! Up to find a coat— jangle/flush! Up to

open a window—jangle/flush! When Miss Sackville West came the other day they spent more time going up and down flushing the toilet and praising the plumbing than they did talking to *her*. In the end even she was made to try it out. Try out the flush, that is. I'm sure there's some kind of deeper meaning in it all but I can't for the life of me think what it is.

"It's most beautifully installed, Millie. It really is. It is an asset we cannot possibly afford to be without. It's almost a work of art in its own right!" If it is such a work of art in its own right why don't they go and install it in the frigging Tate Gallery? Or some such place. I heard there's a urinal in there somewhere. And it's not for public use, neither.

The toilet flushes again.

That's Mr Woolf.

Sound of voices conversing.

Now they're congratulating it on its flush! When I first heard she'd written a book called *Flush* you can imagine what I thought it was about. And it weren't the Barret-Browning's dog.

Pause.

Not only can I have frequent hot baths but frequent flushes too. Well, you know what I means. Talking about flushes, it doesn't do to let them know you are seeing someone. If you get pregnant with a bun or two in the oven, that's OK. They welcome you in, almost take care of the baby themselves and bring it up as one of them. But you let on you're seeing a young man—not bloody likely! Why? Why should this be? She ain't religious so she don't believe in immaculate conceptions. Or she says she ain't religious. But there's all that talk about her mystical feelings. I heard she and Mr Leonard only the other day talking about eternity—how the book was taking an eternity to write— and she was saying it was because of all the mystical feelings she gets when writing it. Later I asked her what mystical meant. And she told me, she did half give me a look.

Pause.

VIRGINIA (*offstage*):

Millie! Millie! (*Slight pause.*) Who are you talking to?

MILLIE:

Oops! I'd better go.

She exits.

*A night sky: moon, stars, drifting constellations.
Enter VIRGINIA with a large box wrapped in brown paper
and tied with string.*

VIRGINIA (*calling out*):

Leonard! Leonard! Do you want to see this?

She places the parcel down on the floor.

Millie, you might have helped me. So strangely preoccupied these days in her room!
Why? Millie! *Millie!* Where is Leonard when I want him? What is she *writing*? Why does
she *want* to write?

Then, to the audience: remembering aloud.

When I lecture at Morley College I of course want the best for my working men and women. I want them to succeed. They are rightly fascinated when I recount my trips to Europe: Italy, Spain, Greece. They enjoy a vicarious journeying. They look up to me, even if some of them do opine that there is scarcely time in their lunch break for reading Proust or trawling through *Candide*. And then there is that poor bespectacled young man who keeps asking plaintively, "Where is *Ulysses* in all this?" and for all I know thinks I am teaching him Arithmetic. I teach him all about my visit to the Acropolis. Again, the plaintive question: "Where is *Ulysses* in all this?" I recount my trip to Sardinia. Again, "Where is *Ulysses* in all this?" He must mean Mr Joyce's ungainly tract but because the question is asked so very frequently I cannot now be sure. What do I say? What *should* I say? So far the question remains unanswerable.

A gong sounds.

Millie!

Enter MILLIE. She looks at the wrapped box.

MILLIE:

People been giving you gifts.

VIRGINIA:

No, no. It's something I caught sight of, need to unwrap—

MILLIE (*pointedly*):

I've got something I'd like *you* to unwrap—

The gong sounds. Then, apologetically.

Some pages...

VIRGINIA *startled, looks around.*

VIRGINIA:

What is Leonard up to? Did you—did you tell him to—?

Slight pause.

MILLIE:

Tell him to do—wha— ?

VIRGINIA *listens in astonishment as the gong sounds again.*

What's the problem, Miss?

Slight pause. Night gives way to dawn.

VIRGINIA (*abrupt change of mood; enthusiastic*):

Do you dance?

MILLIE (*incredulous*):

Do I *dance*?

VIRGINIA:

All respectable girls need to learn the rudiments of dance.

MILLIE:

When I goes to the palais, I dances. Not a lot these days, mind you, what with the work I as to do.

VIRGINIA (*emphatic*):

Flap your arms.

MILLIE:

What?

VIRGINIA:

Flap your arms and gobble.

MILLIE:

Flap me arms and — gobble? Should I fetch Mr Woolf?

VIRGINIA:

No, he's particularly good at it.

MILLIE (*double-take*):

Blimey.

VIRGINIA:

Flap your arms and gobble. Like this.

She flaps her arms and elbows like the wings of a bird, makes gobbling and clucking sounds.

MILLIE:

I think I should get Mr Woolf.

VIRGINIA:

Mr Woolf is better at it than I am. Try it.

MILLIE (*worried*):

Is it *necessary*, Miss?

VIRGINIA:

Try.

She flaps her arms and elbows again, making noises.

Elbows bent, arms akimbo.

*MILLIE copies the movement, reluctantly.
VIRGINIA adjusts MILLIE's posture.*

Mr Eliot was very particular about the *steps*.

MILLIE:

Mr... Thomas Stearns Eliot?

VIRGINIA:

The same. Now: gobble, gobble; gobble, gobble!

MILLIE:

Don't you think you should be lying down, Miss?

VIRGINIA:

No, we stand up for this one. *(Beat.)* It's quite the thing in Bloomsbury.

The gong sounds again. VIRGINIA, terrified, looks round wildly, distracted for a moment.

MILLIE:

There's a lot that's quite the thing in Bloomsbury.

VIRGINIA *(Then, recovering):*

It *is* jolly, isn't it!

She jumps around, laughing and flapping her wings.

MILLIE:

What's it *for*, Ma'am?

VIRGINIA:

Jump two paces to the left. *(She does.)* Gobble, gobble! Then two paces to the right. *(She does.)* Gobble, gobble! Then—*put it all together!*

MILLIE *(trying to escape):*

I'll get back and do the cooking.

VIRGINIA *(angry):*

No! This is of the essence! Do what I say - and do.

MILLIE:

I does that anyway.

VIRGINIA repeats the movement again. MILLIE copies her awkwardly.

VIRGINIA winds up the gramophone. Turkey Trot music slowly gathers speed and rhythm until playing normally.

They do the dance, MILLIE mimicking VIRGINIA. Then dance together, laughing hysterically.

The record winds down suddenly. VIRGINIA trips and falls. Pause.

VIRGINIA (*looking up at MILLIE; satisfied; bemused*):

The Turkey Trot!

Pause.

MILLIE *helps her to her feet.*

MILLIE:

I'm not sure what it's all for, Ma'am, but it does seem to have made complete fools of the both of us.

VIRGINIA (*sudden alarm*):

Something's burning.

MILLIE:

The *Boeuf en Daube*!

She rushes off stage. VIRGINIA picks up the wrapped box and places it on a chair. She begins slowly to undo the string, then layers of wrapping paper.

VIRGINIA (*to herself*):

All life has a rhythm.

She pulls back the layers of paper.

And someone must mark it.

She opens the lid of the box.

And it never will be Millie.

We see the top of a large spherical glass chemist's bottle emerging from the box.

She lifts out the glass sphere, full of green liquid, her face bathed in light. She admires the sphere silently then replaces it in the box.

Well, not yet anyway. (*Slight pause.*) Pages. Pages of *what*? Children's stories? It's not easy writing for children. (*She sniffs the air.*) Something was burning. And to think we paid Marcel to supply cookery lessons... She'd be better off at Charleston: learning from Grace in the farmhouse kitchen. Chained to the Aga, scraping the vegetables at the kitchen table. Might even get her portrait painted. Now *there's* someone who is an asset to the click! Nessa won't part with her though. And in any event, Mrs Higgins and her

family are truly at home in High Holborn. We simply don't have the space for a High Holborn in Rodmell. We simply don't have the *stairs*.

Pause.

How I love the smell of basil and rosemary. And that trace of garlic!

Pause.

Without good food how would English Literature survive?

The telephone rings. She picks up the receiver.

VIRGINIA:

Tom, Tom! / *(She laughs girlishly.)* Yes, I thought it was *very* dramatic. / For someone as anaemic as you are, you *do* have a glory in blood. / Yes, I know it's *liturgical*. / But— But— / I *know* it takes place in a cathedral— / Dragged through an ash-heap / Amid torn flesh and spilled brains! / I know, I know! *(Then to the audience, putting her hand over the receiver.)* What *is it* about Anglicanism—? / *(Then into the phone.)* Does she? *Really?* I *am* sorry—yes—you *are* doing the right thing. / What do *they* know, the doctors? With their proportions and analyses and cold limp hands—

MILLIE enters, carrying a wooden spoon.

(To MILLIE.) Why the spoon? / *(Then to the phone.)* No, no... I was talking to Millie.

MILLIE:

I —

VIRGINIA *(still on the phone)*:

Of *course* we'll publish it. But will they think it's a detective story? With that title? I'm not sure we want to dabble in populist literature. / Oh, *Faber... Faber!* / Yes, yes I *know* we published *Flush*. / *Flush*. / *Flush*, Tom! / *(Then, to MILLIE.)* Why the spoon?

MILLIE:

Mrs Woolf—

VIRGINIA:

I said, Why the spoon? / *(Then on the phone.)* No, I'm not *accusing* you of anything, Tom.

MILLIE:

It'll be ready fairly soon Ma'am. Mr Woolf wondered if you fancied a little Beaujolais.

VIRGINIA:

Yes, I'd fancy —would like— a little Beaujolais. Very much desire—covet, *crave*, implore— a little Beaujolais. / (*On the phone.*) I'm sure you would, Tom. If it were at all possible to pour it down the telephone wire. / Murder ? Having a second innings?—at the Old Vic?

MILLIE *walks offstage.*

MILLIE (*muttering*):

Beaujolais! Beaujolais!

VIRGINIA:

But then, with the whodunnit title— / Of course we'd like to see you. 1935 will be a significant year for— / 1935. / I know. / We'll get Millie to make up the spare bed. And lay a fire. / It's her day off. She won't mind at all— / No. / Very biddable— no, not at all— / As I said, Millie is Millie. We'd be quite lost without her—

The line goes dead. She listens into the receiver. Shakes it. Listens again.

VIRGINIA:

Rodmell telephone exchange easily slips back into the Jurrassic period. (*Slight pause.*)
Goodbye.

She puts the phone down. She clutches her head, as if in agony. She rocks to and fro, as if in pain.

A scream from offstage: MILLIE.

The telephone rings again. VIRGINIA tentatively picks it up. She listens. Then puts it down.

Enter MILLIE.

MILLIE:

Mice! There is mice in the kitchen. We must get that man up from Lewes.

VIRGINIA (*impatient*):

As long there is only *beef* in the *Boeuf en Daube* I don't think Leonard or I will mind too much.

MILLIE:

But what about me? I don't like it when they shits on my foot.

VIRGINIA (*looks at her*):

Give your foot a little shake. Anyway, Rodmell mice are elite mice. They should be respected. (*Slight pause.*) Mr Eliot is coming to stay. You must prepare the spare bed.

MILLIE:

We don't have a spare bed.

VIRGINIA:

The divan.

MILLIE:

That's *my* bed, Mrs Woolf. And I ain't giving up my bed for no Turkey Trotter.

VIRGINIA:

I am sure Tom—Mr Eliot—will demonstrate the finer aspects of the dance if you're civil.

MILLIE:

I don't want to learn no stupid dance. I got enough responsibilities as it is. Anyway that dance went out with the lark. (*She sees the box.*) What's that? Your medicine?

She goes to get a closer look in the box.

Seen one of those in Boots' window.

VIRGINIA (*angrily*):

Don't touch!

MILLIE:

Don't touch? I'm only looking, that's all ever I does. Take you a fair while to drink all that lot.

VIRGINIA:

It's not for—It's not for consumption but for something else.

MILLIE:

Something else?

VIRGINIA:

Art.

MILLIE (*muttering*):

Another one for the frigging Tate gallery.

VIRGINIA:

It *is* rather beautiful. And quite quite lost in a chemist's window in Oxford Street. You do see the beauty of form, don't you? You were there when Clive explained the rationale behind the theory? You were surely listening intently?

MILLIE:

I was there Miss, hoovering his electric blue carpet. But I felt such a stranger down at Charleston. Wherever I went Mr Bell was rabbiting on about significant form... Significant this, significant that... Couldn't dust a shelf or wash a dish without some such high-falutin' talk... And Mrs Bell and Mr Grant with their paintbrushes... And their aprons... I had to keep moving or someone might have started painting me all over... (*Laughs.*) Every surface... every corner... (*Giggles.*)

VIRGINIA *kneels down and lifts up the glass sphere.*

VIRGINIA:

It is, I think, Rubenesque... Women have been known to love women, you know.

Pause.

VIRGINIA *puts the sphere back in its box.*

MILLIE (*silly*):

Would you have liked a child Miss?

VIRGINIA (*oblivious*):

Have you been in love, Millie?

MILLIE:

Have I been in love?

VIRGINIA (*absently*):

I was the Emperor of Abyssinia, once.

MILLIE:

I'm sure you was Miss, I'm sure you was.

She turns to leave.

VIRGINIA (*vulnerable, needy*):

Don't go. (*Slight pause.*) You know how I like to hear your news.

MILLIE:

My news? What news?

VIRGINIA:

What you got up to on your day off.

MILLIE:

I ain't had no days off. You knows that.

VIRGINIA:

Did you see a friend? Did you go to visit a friend? On 'ampstead 'eath? (*Correcting herself.*) Hampstead Heath?

MILLIE:

What?

VIRGINIA:

When you went to the fair... Did you have a close friend?

MILLIE (*changing the subject; looking at the box*):

Don't you think you should take more care of *that*...? In case it gets broke...

VIRGINIA:

Broken?

MILLIE:

It could shatter. Looks a bit squishy inside.

VIRGINIA:

Hold my hand.

MILLIE:

What?

VIRGINIA:

Hold my hand.

MILLIE:

Hold your hand?

VIRGINIA:

Yes, hold my hand.

Pause.

VIRGINIA stretches out her hand. MILLIE moves nearer, holds out her hand.

MILLIE (suddenly removing her hand):

Why.....?

VIRGINIA:

Because I've asked you to.

VIRGINIA catches hold of MILLIE's hand, looking at it entranced. Then, almost imperceptibly.

I haven't felt a hand as warm as this for years.

Pause.

MILLIE looks at her awkwardly but compassionately.

MILLIE:

VIRGINIA (quietly, looking up at her, distracted):

Not since...

*MILLIE attempts to withdraw her hand.
VIRGINIA clings on to it.*

MILLIE:

It hit you bad, didn't it, Ma'am.

VIRGINIA (*sharply*):

Mrs Woolf, *never* Ma'am. (*Slight pause. Then, absently.*) Mother's death was the worst thing that could happen. /

MILLIE:

/ It was a long time ago now, Mrs Woolf. A very long time.

VIRGINIA *leans forward, clutching* MILLIE *on both shoulders. MILLIE seems transfixed for a moment. VIRGINIA leans closer. A beat.*

MILLIE:

I'm sorry. (*Slight pause, then almost in silence.*) Terrible thing to happen to a child.

MILLIE *shakes herself free.*

I know what it's like. (*Slight pause. Then, quietly.*) It happened to me.

Pause. Then, gently.

Shall I fetch Mr Woolf?

VIRGINIA (*dismissive*):

No. No. No need for Leonard.

MILLIE:

Then... I'll add... a little coriander... to the ingredients.

She turns to leave.

VIRGINIA:

And today's post.....?

MILLIE:

I'll bring it to you, Ma'am. As you wish. On a plate.

MILLIE *leaves.*

VIRGINIA:

Millie –

MILLIE:

Yes?

VIRGINIA:

Boeuf en Daube does not accommodate coriander.

MILLIE *exits*.

Birdsong, distant running water. Leafy shadows.

VIRGINIA *takes the wide-brimmed flower-decorated hat, puts it on, and sits on a chair.*

She takes a cigar from a box, sniffs it, rolling it between her fingers.

VIRGINIA *(to herself)*:

No bolt, no bar will curb the freedom of my mind. *(Slight pause.)* Why write fiction? Why do we *need* language? And language, what is that? *(Slight pause.)* Do animals have language? When I look at Mitzi, I wonder. Is there a marmoset language? Is there a *servant* language? A servant *behaviour*? Is there a servant life I do not comprehend?—something I am completely *missing*? *(Slight pause. Rapid change of tone and looking at the audience.)* Words: why do we have them? Corrupt, filthy, insubordinate, pointless... What earthly reason is there for their existence? Words which we exchange with classes lower than ourselves but which live essentially in the mind; essentially, gloriously in the mind and never at all in dictionaries...! *(Then, rapt.)* Incarnadine: multitudinous seas incarnadine... Where *are* the original minds these days? *(Then, as if asking herself the question.)* And the price for allowing words to originate in the mind? Life itself.

Pause. Then, again to the audience: impassioned, direct.

Imagine. Imagine an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms.... And as they fall, as they shape themselves into Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old. The moment of importance came not here but *there*... *(Then, more passionately.)* A writer must write what she *chooses*, not what she *must*, basing her work upon her own feeling—her *own* feeling!—and not upon convention... No plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style... *(Pause.)* Life... is *not* a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged.... Life is a luminous halo — a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.

Enter MILLIE with a pile of letters on a silver salver.

VIRGINIA *looks at her and motions her to leave them on the writing desk. MILLIE does and, with a little curtsey, goes back out.*

VIRGINIA *puts down the cigar. She moves to the desk, picks up a letter, recognizes the handwriting.*

Katherine Mansfield. Do I really want to read Miss Mansfield's rheumatic prose this iridescent summer morning? (*Then, rapt.*) 'Let us go exploring, this summer morning, the plum blossom and the bee...'

Pause. She looks up.

I was the Emperor of Abyssinia once. I think Bernard Shaw knew it. (*Slight pause.*) Leonard, take these letters away.

Pause.

I at least can say I have had my photo on the front page of the Daily Mirror.

Pause. Looking round; no sign of LEONARD.

Millie!

Pause.

Millie!

Enter MILLIE, breathlessly, with a piece of paper in her hand.

MILLIE (*annoyed*):

I was checking the recipe.

VIRGINIA:

Recipe?

MILLIE:

For the meal. The *meal*, ma'am? You've hardly eaten these last few days. (*Looks at paper*) Garlic and thyme: done that. Sear the meat first: done that. And I've added the veal stock.

VIRGINIA:

Juniper berries?

MILLIE:

We ain't got no juniper berries.

VIRGINIA:

We must have juniper berries!

MILLIE:

Rodmell don't 'ave 'em.

VIRGINIA:

Go down to the river.

MILLIE:

The river?

VIRGINIA:

The deep swirling river.

MILLIE:

Oh.

VIRGINIA:

The Ouse. It's only a short stroll. Across the downs.

MILLIE:

And what if I pick the *wrong berries*? What if I pick *yewtree berries*? (*Looking at her, then the paper*).

VIRGINIA:

Then Hitler will be spared a particular assignment. (*Then, quietly.*) Leonard and I are on his death list. (*She looks at MILLIE who barely suppresses a smile.*)

MILLIE (*looking askance at her, ignoring this; then reading quickly*):

Cut the beef into large chunks, about three ounces each and about one inch thick.

VIRGINIA (*moving nearer MILLIE*):

Small chunks. Mitzi can't digest large chunks.

MILLIE:

Mix the beef with the mari—marinade—into a large bowl; press the meat down firmly.

VIRGINIA:

Very firmly.

MILLIE:

Cover and cool for one or two days...

VIRGINIA:

Three days...

MILLIE:

Stir every now and again. (*Slight pause.*) Done that. In between the slopping out. (*Looking closely at the paper.*) Strain the mari—marinade—into a bowl, put aside the flavourings, remove any spices that have settled, then dry between double thick—thicknesses of plain paper. (*Slight pause.*) Warm a tablespoon of oil in a large cooking pot over a medium heat. Medium heat? Kitchener don't do medium heat. Season the meat and colour a few pieces at a time until crusty and golden, transferring it to another bowl...

VIRGINIA:

Preparation is vital.

MILLIE (*reading*):

Stir in the meat, *drown* in the marinade. Bring to a simmer on top of a hob, skimming the fat which rises to the surface. Cook in the oven for five hours—or until melting—meltingly tender. (*Slight pause.*) Well, it's becoming meltingly tender right now. Leave to stand for fifteen minutes before skimming off the fat. Doesn't mention juniper berries here, Mrs Woolf.

VIRGINIA:

Add the claret.

MILLIE *moves to go out.*

This *is* the Provençal recipe you're following?

MILLIE *exits then returns almost immediately.*

MILLIE:

Do we have the butterfly napkins today, Miss?

VIRGINIA:

Mr Woolf is curiously partial to the butterfly napkins.

MILLIE:

I know, Miss.

VIRGINIA:

You must instruct us in the making of them.

MILLIE (*double-take*):

-----!

She hurries out.

VIRGINIA (*ironic humour*):

As I get older, napkins reassert their importance.

The gong starts sounding again, distant, plangent, metronome-like.

VIRGINIA *ignores it, moves back to her writing desk.*

VIRGINIA (*transcendent*):

To make the moment perfect...

Pause. The gong has stopped.

What book shall I write next? (*Slight pause.*) A book of silence?

Silence.

How does one write about silence?

Pause.

Must a new language be invented? A language of lesser signs and meanings? Or greater signs and meanings? Perhaps punctuation is the first to go—

Reaches towards a letter. Opens it with a letter knife. Reads silently.

A cheque from the Athenaeum. Well, that's nice. But if punctuation is the first to go the floodgates will truly be opened. As Mr Joyce demonstrates so clearly. No particular word supporting the architecture of a sentence... Or was that Mr Lawrence? (*Slight pause.*) What do I think of *Ulysses*? (*Slight pause. Shudders.*) What *don't* I think of *Ulysses*...

Pause. Then, looking ahead.

If I write about silence am I writing about death?

She starts to write slowly and quietly in her exercise book.

A clock chimes.

Pause.

VIRGINIA walks back and sits on the chair, removing her hat.

LEONARD walks forward from the shadows, stands behind her, places his hands on her shoulders, bends forward and kisses her head gently.

She half-turns, looks up, smiles, holding his hand tightly and affectionately.

VIRGINIA:

I am expecting a call from Vita. *(Slight pause.)* Summoned to Long Barn. Harold is away and she thinks it's the ideal time. *(Another sideways look at LEONARD.)* Millie will look after you, of that I am sure. For a few days. You have your Fabian meeting and the Labour party needs your involvement at Rodmell. Not that the servants ever say much or contribute to the discussion... Vita has a new specimen. Wants to share it with me. *(Laughs.)* Who'd be a gardener? *(Slight pause. Then, turning to him.)* Yes, I'll be careful, dearest. Everyone knows how much you care for me; no one could be more certain of that than I am. No one could be more certain... *(Slight pause.)* Some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends. *(Exit LEONARD.)* The weather is perfect. Clouds of blue and purple flying over the downs. And the faint sound of the sea: wave reiterating upon wave. *(Slight pause.)* We might go down to Rye. Or Studland Bay. *(Slight pause.)* You'll be fine with Millie.

Pause. A clock chimes.

I was the Emperor of Abyssinia once. You see, I can't ever forget that. How can I? No one could be happier than we have been. *(Slight pause.)* Always the sound of the sea: blue light upon the water and the senseless waves talking... Perhaps we'll visit Rye. Or Studland.

A clock chimes.

The weather is perfect. Clouds of blue and purple flying over the downs. The downs momentarily black under their passing. Vita has a new specimen. An orchid, wild. Kept under glass: rare, delicate. Maybe we'll go down to Rye. Or—

Silence.

Birdsong, almost imperceptible at first, then electronic, threatening, intrusive.

Maybe we'll go down to Rye... Or Studland... The incessant sound of the sea. Clouds of blue and purple flying over the land...

Pause.

And the dog barking and barking.

Birdsong crescendos, merging into a telephone ringing.

VIRGINIA *lets it ring before deciding to answer.*

VIRGINIA *(on phone):*

No... I have *not* ordered anything from Harrods. / *(Pause.)* I *did* see a blue dress for four and sixpence in *Selfridge's* window. / Four and sixpence. / It *did* seem particularly good value. That was just after we— /— had had tea in Buszards... / It was my *birthday!* / How did you know? / I was fifty-one. / No, I don't want—No... The singleness of the one I have is more than enough. A rhapsody in glass. / I do not *want* another ... How did you—? / It is green, not red and I'm *more* than happy with that. / No, I do *not* want a crocodile, we have a marmoset. / *And* a printing press. / Goodbye.

She puts down the phone.

VIRGINIA:

Did I just have that conversation?

A roll of thunder. A flash of lightning as MILLIE enters.

MILLIE:

Have you read my pages?

VIRGINIA:

Pages?

MILLIE:

Have you read—?

VIRGINIA *(correcting):*

Your manuscript. (Slight pause.) No, but I will. *(Then, quickly to herself.)* I know I will.

Another roll of thunder. Heavy rain.

MILLIE:

You won't *forget*, will you?

VIRGINIA (*seething*):

No, I will not forget your pages.

MILLIE:

Thank you. (*Beat. Then, almost imperceptibly.*) My pages is where I am.

Pause.

They stand looking at each other. The rain ceases.

It's almost ready now. Cooked. (*Slight pause.*) How are you feeling? (*VIRGINIA stares at her.*) Sorry about the dock leaves. (*Slight pause.*) You used to be a little harum-scarum thing. So I was told. By Sophie. Lottie. The click knows it all.

VIRGINIA:

They do?

MILLIE:

There's not much gets past the click. All thinks very fondly of you. Very fondly. Not a bad word. (*Slight pause.*) Writing anything good, Mrs? Mrs Woof. Woof.

VIRGINIA:

Pointz Hall.

MILLIE:

Exciting, ain't it. Writing.

They circle round each other.

VIRGINIA (*anguished*):

What do you hope for, Millie?

MILLIE:

Pointz Hall. Is it like your other one, *The Lighthouse*? The one which got the prize.

VIRGINIA:

The Femina Vie Heureuse. (*Beat.*) The Femina Vie Heureuse.

MILLIE:

French weren't it.

VIRGINIA:

The prize yes. The book was in English. (*Slight pause. Then, correcting.*) To the Lighthouse.

They look at each other. Beat.

MILLIE:

I'd like to win a prize. Must be good winning a prize.

VIRGINIA:

It is good. It is very good. If it's the *right* accolade.

MILLIE:

Was *that* the right acco — acco-whatsit?

Pause.

VIRGINIA (*oblivious*):

You will tell me if Vita calls, won't you?

MILLIE:

If I remembers to answer the door, Miss. (*Slight pause.*) I'll be cooking and Mr Woolf wanted tea in the garden so I can't do both at once. (*Slight pause.*) I've added the claret.

VIRGINIA:

Claret?

MILLIE:

But not no coriander. (*Laughs.*) No mice, neither. Neighbour's cat just walked in. Good job Mitzi is in her cage.

VIRGINIA (*sudden focus*):

The pot is covered, no doubt. (*Slight pause.*) Keep the lid on.

MILLIE:

Yes, I'll keep the lid on. (*Pause. Looks towards the box.*) You won't forget my pages, will you?

VIRGINIA:

I won't forget your pages. (*Beat.*) Why should I?

MILLIE:

You're very busy. Your novels, dreams, worries, concerns, nerves, headaches, breakdowns and whatnot.

VIRGINIA:

Your manuscript is my next port of call.

MILLIE:

You make it sound like a... voyage.

VIRGINIA:

It is.

MILLIE:

Was one of your novels, weren't it?

VIRGINIA:

-----?

MILLIE:

The Voyage Out.

VIRGINIA:

Melymbrosia.

MILLIE:

Took you a long time to write. Have you gone as far as you want to?

VIRGINIA (*irate*):

Millie, why the *questions*?

MILLIE:

Just waiting for the thing to cook, and do, Ma'am. (*Pause. They look at each other.*) Lot of waiting.

Pause.

I had some of that last year.

Fairground music gathers rapidly to a crescendo. Flickering image of chair-o-planes whizzing round.

VIRGINIA:

If Vita calls, you will answer the door. She rang. But I think she might call.

MILLIE:

I had some of that last year. When the music ended.

VIRGINIA:

Music?

MILLIE:

When the fairground music came to a stop. (*The music suddenly stops, as does the flickering image.*) They left me. On the heath. It were dark. My friends went off.

VIRGINIA:

Dark? (*Beat.*) Were you... afraid?

MILLIE:

The silence; not a sound. Fairground lights: gold, silver, red. The Big Wheel came to a stop. dodgems, Noah's Ark, swing boats, chair-o-planes: all stopped. (*Slight pause.*) I came to a stop too. I came to such a place of stillness and silence I never thought I'd get going again. (*Beat.*) As if the silent world opened up and I was all alone on a big dark stage. (*Slight pause.*) Never felt so frightened or so at peace in my life. (*Slight pause.*) Do you know what I mean Miss?

VIRGINIA (*oblivious*):

If Vita calls, you will answer the door?

MILLIE (*profound satisfaction*):

I never felt so frightened or so at peace.

VIRGINIA:

I'm not sure if Mr Eliot won't turn up ahead of time. There will be enough, won't there?

MILLIE:

Have you ever felt like that, Miss? (*Slight pause.*) Mr Woolf says you often feel like that.

VIRGINIA:

Leonard? (*Slight pause.*) Mr Woolf is waiting for his—

MILLIE:

Oh. Right.

She goes out.

VIRGINIA (*transported; remembering*):

The curtain, swaying... in the wind... Sun through an open window. Voices on the lawn. Flowers on a curtain shot through with afternoon light. The blind twisting and turning. Twisting and turning. The toggle on the cord *knocking* the wall. And me, in shadow, listening and watching. (*Slight pause.*) Far off, the salt-smell of the sea and the waves breaking.

Pause.

Why is there such meaning in transient things?

She puts the needle on the gramophone record. A burst of Turkey Trot music. She lifts the needle off the record.

She lifts the lid of the box and looks inside. Then she touches the radio gently, then the telephone. She walks to her lectern and picks up her pen.

Silence.

Has the war begun? The meadows flooded again, the river swollen. (*Slight pause.*) *Pointz Hall...* Or, *Between the Acts?* (*Leans forward and crosses out Pointz Hall, substitutes Between the Acts.*) Am I still that small child listening and watching for the scene to unfold?

Pause. Then, rapt.

The pulse and breath of creation.

Pause.

A new *what* by Virginia Woolf?

Enter MILLIE with a white napkin.

MILLIE:

Did you want me to show you now, Ma'am?

VIRGINIA (*aside*):

Always a servant from the kitchen or that person from Porlock...

MILLIE:

Person from Porlock?

VIRGINIA (*exasperated*):

A new prose-poem, meditation, interior monologue, rhapsody, stream-of-consciousness, fugue?

MILLIE *opens the napkin, shaking it out.*

MILLIE:

You does it like this, Ma'am

VIRGINIA *watches, reluctantly.*

MILLIE *deftly folds the napkin into a butterfly shape. She holds it aloft with cupped hands as if it is about to fly.*

They never flies straight though, do they, butterflies.

VIRGINIA:

Or moths. (*Then, quietly.*) They seem to manage.

MILLIE:

Now you try.

VIRGINIA *looks aghast.* MILLIE *shakes out the napkin, offers it to VIRGINIA.*

MILLIE:

Mrs Woolf?

VIRGINIA (*declining*):

This is one form of art you will always do better than either of us.

MILLIE:

You is too kind.

VIRGINIA:

Yes, us is. (*Correcting herself.*) We are. (*Slight pause. Then sudden wild anger.*) *Why are you trying to humiliate us!*

MILLIE:

What?

VIRGINIA (*searching for the words*):

We no longer *use* napkins! That you *know*!

MILLIE:

Not trying to humiliate you. (*Very slight pause.*) Mr Woolf —

VIRGINIA:

Not Mr Woolf! You answer to *me*!

MILLIE:

But!

VIRGINIA:

To *me*!

MILLIE:

Wha— ?

VIRGINIA (*furious*):

You answer to *me*! Have you not *forgotten*? DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

MILLIE:

Of course I understands.

VIRGINIA (*correcting*):

Understand!

MILLIE:

But you asked me to show you how to do it! And I did. (*Stuffs napkin in her pockets.*)

VIRGINIA (*fuming*):

Gongs, napkins, uniforms went out with the Victorians! We've said goodbye to all that. Said goodbye to all that suffocating mahogany oriental patriarchal Victorian gloom. We are more *enlightened*.

MILLIE:

Said goodbye to the Emperor of Abyssinia, too —

VIRGINIA (*fury*):

We are more enlightened!

MILLIE:

You liked dressing up—them Dreadnought days—Pretending to be a Johnny, a kaffir.
Fooled the Admiralty, didn't you?

VIRGINIA:

What is your vision, Millie! What is your *vision*?

MILLIE (*attempting to explain*):

Mr Woolf —

VIRGINIA *springs at her, grabs her by the throat. A mad eruption of irrationality.*

VIRGINIA:

We are *done* with oppression!

VIRGINIA *attempts to throttle* MILLIE. MILLIE *fights back. A violent struggle. MILLIE gasps for breath, losing consciousness.*

There is *no* oppression!

MILLIE *splutters, faints, sinks to the floor. Lies still, apparently dead.*

VIRGINIA *stands looking down at* MILLIE, *victorious, breathless, excited. After a while, MILLIE stirs, rises gradually to her knees, rubbing her throat.*

MILLIE:

That's what you would *liked* to have done...

VIRGINIA *looks on breathless, fascinated. MILLIE sits up.*

But you never did.

Pause.

VIRGINIA (*agitated*):

I can smell burning...

MILLIE (*rubbing her neck*):

Have you looked at my pages yet?

VIRGINIA (*trembling*):

No. But I will. Will look. I will look at them. (*Slight pause. Still trembling.*) I have them there. (*Points to table.*) Once I've set Tom's new poem.

MILLIE:

Thank you.

VIRGINIA (*shuddering and trembling*):

I *will* look at your manuscript.

MILLIE:

Thank you. Most gracious. (*She half-curtseys.*) It isn't that I'm trying to —

VIRGINIA (*residual anger*):

What?

MILLIE:

Rival you, Miss.

VIRGINIA:

Rival me?

MILLIE:

It's not that I'm trying to do that. No one could rival you Miss, not even Katherine Mansfield.

VIRGINIA:

Not one who stinks like a civet cat that had taken to streetwalking.

MILLIE:

She does get about.

VIRGINIA (*rapid change of mood*):

What is your vision?

MILLIE *looks blank.*

Your *vision*?

MILLIE *looks puzzled.*

The way you look at the world, your point of view. What is your *point of view*?

MILLIE:

I didn't know I had one.

VIRGINIA:

It will come out in your writing. (*Slight pause.*) It will come out unconsciously. It always does.

Pause.

VIRGINIA *suddenly gets the manuscript from the table. Takes it from its envelope. Stares at it long and incredulously. Looks up bemused, then looks at it again.*

Pause.

VIRGINIA (*gob-smacked*):

A cookery book!

MILLIE:

My recipes. (*Slight pause.*) What did you *think* it was?

VIRGINIA:

Who on earth would want to read such a thing?

MILLIE:

People like me, Miss.

VIRGINIA:

Do you plan to be the next Mrs Beeton?

MILLIE:

No but I hopes to be like Nellie and advertise the New World Gas Cooker with the special Regulo facility in the Daily Mail. Mr and Mrs Laughton were asking after me.

VIRGINIA:

Mr and Mrs Laughton?

MILLIE:

Nellie has done very well there. They don't let her wash a dish. And sometimes *they* cooks for *her*. Sometimes Miss Dietrich sings and Mr Cooper brings flowers. Or maybe Mr Chaplin calls in occasionally and does a turn. Miss Lanchester is very caring. Gives her time off whenever she wants it. Nellie's become quite well-known in her circle. There's talk of her appearing in a film, I understands. The same could happen to me. And my recipes.

VIRGINIA (*triumphantly*):

Then you *do* have a vision.

MILLIE:

I'd like to better me-self, Ma, am.

VIRGINIA *picks up the telephone receiver and dials.*

MILLIE:

What you doing, Miss?

VIRGINIA (*despairing*):

I'm making a call to the universe.

MILLIE:

I thought you might be ringing Miss Lanchester.

VIRGINIA *shakes her head, mouthing No.*

Perhaps you'd write a few words. '*Millie's Bloomsbury Cookery Book*'. As recommended by Virginia Woolf. Of Monks House, Rodmell, and the Hogarth Press.

MILLIE *goes out.*

VIRGINIA *listens to ear-piece. Getting no response, she puts the phone down.*

VIRGINIA:

'*Millie's Bloomsbury Cookery Book*'. With a Foreward by Virginia Woolf. (*Slight pause.*)
But is it literature?

Pause.

And would it sell? And what would be the grosses, as they say in America.

Pause.

In 1910 humanity changed. And it started with the servant. In 1938, what changes might there be then?

A RADIO ANNOUNCER's voice from the Bakelite radio. VIRGINIA turns to listen.

RADIO ANNOUNCER:

This is London. In a moment you will hear the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Neville Chamberlain, speaking from No 10 Downing Street. His speech will be heard all over the Empire, throughout the continent of America, and in a large number of foreign countries. Mr Chamberlain. (CHAMBERLAIN's *voice*.) 'Tomorrow Parliament is going to meet and I shall make a full statement of the events which have led up to the present anxious and critical situation...'

CHAMBERLAIN's voice fades away.

VIRGINIA:

Strange how friends and relatives die all around us but the servants are always there. (*Slight pause.*) Roger's death was worse than Lytton's; such a blank wall. Such a silence. Then Ottoline, Ka, Maynard, Thoby... How it has all reverberated through Nessa! (*Slight pause.*) Will our servants then reverberate through us?

Enter MILLIE. She stands looking at VIRGINIA.

MILLIE:

Just checking on you, Ma'am. (*Slight pause.*) You heard the broadcast? Things don't look too good.

VIRGINIA looks back at her.

I've added the claret.

MILLIE goes out.

VIRGINIA (*to herself*):

The fields flooded again. And the downs sodden. Leonard planting iris. Is that what one does in time of crisis: plant iris?

Pause. Then, wanting to be overheard.

Do I hear guns far off? Do I hear guns? (*Slight pause.*) Mitzi died of cold on Christmas Day. (*Slight pause. Then, looking up.*) Dr Freud gave me a narcissus.

Pause. Then, to the audience.

It is true that I do enjoy my hours in a library... But 'holiday' is perhaps too aspirational. To enter a library is to journey into the unexpected. You never *know* what you may encounter. The whole spectrum of civilisation, perhaps. A new book? A new name? A new horizon? A new world? (*Slight pause.*) The sight of an unknown volume...A title missed... As when I saw... *The Story of God* on bookshelves in the Bodleian... *The Story of God!* How had I not come across this intriguing title before? How could I have missed such a revelatory spiritual treatise? My heart pounded; I was all excitement. I put on my glasses and reached forward for the book...

She puts on her glasses, reaches forward, taking the book off the shelf, looks at it carefully and reads the title.

'The... Story... of... Cod...: Deep Sea Fishing in the North Atlantic'... (*Slight pause.*) Sometimes enlightenment depends on a good pair of spectacles.

Pause.

But sometimes things are very clear indeed: one nets that dark fin seen circling in the depths far out.

Pause.

One lives with it and nurtures it until it becomes part and parcel of one's own being. (*Slight pause. Then, an epiphany.*) We are the music; we are the words; we are the thing itself... (*Slight pause.*) To find a means of expression; listening to the dance of the rain and watching the movement of light on the lawn. (*Slight pause.*) Hearing that dark fountain within: its language and story.

Pause.

How I interest myself!

Pause.

Recognizing the pattern, the pulse and breath of creation, and the song of the wild rose.

Pause.

Enter MILLIE, clutching a carving knife.

VIRGINIA looks at her. A beat.

MILLIE:

The meal is ready now, Mrs Woolf. (*Pause.*) Shall we take our places?

The last strike of the gong.

Blackout.

Appendix 3: Practice-as-Research

Rapid-Response Questionnaire

Both practice-as research plays had two fully-staged performances. *The Ruth Ellis Show* was performed on Tuesday July 8 and Wednesday July 9, 2014. *Servants* was performed on November Thursday November 5 and Friday November 6, 2015.

Each audience member was given a rapid-response questionnaire sheet and a pencil and requested to answer the questions anonymously and then drop the sheet in a box before leaving the theatre. The audience had approximately ten minutes after the show to fill in the answers before college lock-up. The responses were then arranged in clusters for each question.

The audience questionnaires for *The Ruth Ellis Show* and *Servants* with the audience responses to each question included are given below. The slash denotes divisions between the views of two people or more.

The Ruth Ellis Show

1. What did you like about the show?

- a) The use of verse. / The verse aspects worked really well. / The verse.
- b) The use of lighting at the back. / The stage design is nicely considered and the lighting is excellent. / Excellent use of props and lighting.
- c) Diffusion and confusion of spaces, times and roles fit to portray the woman who has the problem of setting her own boundary, or borderline problem. It is very cutting edge. / The dual nature of the story—re playing the trial whilst looking back over Ruth's life. / The concept of the way the story was relayed using snippets of the past and present.
- d) Very good acting. Girl playing Jackie is particularly talented. / Versatility to convey different points.
- e) I loved the fragmented narration— it worked really well in the first half and felt like the machinations of memory. / The script is well-written and delivered beautifully by the cast. / I liked the different levels that came through. / The interweaving of the non-chronological narratives worked really well. / The Joan Littlewood quality of layering and constant unexpectedness. / The transitions of time seemed to work really well. / Mostly, the transitions between scenes and the way actors were changing the tone of their

voices. /

f) Interesting story about a real character. Able to relate to the situation. Draws parallels with the modern issues of justice i.e. British justice, terrorism. / The humanity.

2. What aspects of the production did you most enjoy?

a) The merging of the different scenes. / I particularly enjoyed the narrative style which struck me as an almost stream-of-consciousness experience. / The way in which events were portrayed as happening concurrently. / I enjoyed the constant movement and quick succession of dialogue.

b) I liked the frequent switch between the first person and the third person point of view in the acting. / The use of the ensemble, multi-role-ing and repetition of lines was both chilling and effective. / The way Ruth Ellis presented herself in constantly new aspects of her personality and the quality of the acting in general. / Alter ego/self-conscious character. Very visual demonstration of Ruth's emotion. / Ruth's dialogue in particular.

c) I think the lighting definitely helped on articulating the time-space. / Music. Emotive use of lighting and space. / The light. / Phonics were effective. / The lighting is incredible. / The silhouette at the back. / Lighting and use of silhouettes. /

d) Staging. Set design. / The staging was excellent.

e) The use of verse worked really well—gave a flow to the action on stage without getting in the way. / The use of the chorus.

3. Can you identify any 'spiritual' moments that you felt were there in the performance tonight?

a) Yes, Ruth Ellis had an underlying honesty, almost a childlike side.

b) Ruth embracing herself. / When the two Ruths joined together.

c) 'My wound bleeds and nobody knows'. / 'Where he goes, I will go'. / At the beginning of the second half there was a real sense of the ensemble as a congregation, the speaking-as-one reminiscent of the Passion reading on Good Friday. (Somewhat appropriately.)

d) The baby dying in relation to the abortion situation scene.

e) The moment when all point at Ellis as the guilty person.

f) Lady in red: 'evil spirit' possessing thoughts of Ruth? Not necessarily evil but pulling her to the 'other' side. / Questioning of hell.

g) No. / I did not think it was particularly spiritual but it was definitely touching the realm of the psyche.

4. Any other thoughts?

- a) Your play was thrilling. / Lovely. / Thank you!
- b) The lead character 'Ruth' was superb. / Lead actor, Katie Turner, is the best performer I have ever seen. / Ruth was 'fab'.
- c) Well-executed show with good performances and effective use of props and lighting.
- d) Had a sense of Albert Camus' L'Etranger to it. This is a very good thing.

Servants

1. What did you like about the show?

- a) The way in which Virginia Woolf's own words were incorporated. / The language and placement of Woolf within the cultural and political milieu. / The insight into the time and the experiences of women. / The dialogue was enjoyable.
- b) The depiction of a personality 'on the brink'. / The way in which her moments of madness were portrayed. / Loved the reflective sections of the text. Made me think about lots — isolation and madness of the lonely creative person. Suffocation, claustrophobia. / The sensitivity of her impending madness. /
- c) The soliloquys. / Beautifully chosen language exploring the loss of a loved one and one's reason. The irregularity of the relationship between Virginia and Millie is a symptom. / The mishearing and the misreading. / The twist at end e.g. the recipe book.
- d) Humanity. The character of V.W. in contrast to dis-humanity of their servant.
- e) The way it was performed in the round and how the performers included the audience in the play. / The set-up of the audience around the stage. / The sound effects and lighting. / Set and sound/vision. / The script was really nice. I felt the stage design/lighting/audio was very effective and added a great deal. / The structure, the sound design. / The way the stage was decorated e.g. the sea shells. The way you put the music sounds.
- f) Incredible acting. Very impressive. / The actress were fabulous and the set was very effective too./ I liked the acting very much and the play was really great. / The actresses were excellent, Stephanie in particular. / The acting, the humour. / Strong performances and well-written. / The performances, especially Millie. The humour although sometimes too subtle for its own good. / Casting. / Staging and acting.
- g) The subtlety of the relationship between the two women. The exploration of servitude. / The dynamic between Mrs Woolf and Millie. / Intensity of the two person cast. / Being immersed in the story with the characters. / The relationship between

Virginia and Millie. The tense and tender moments worked well. / I felt there was the most spark in the scene where Woolf tried to kiss the servant. Perhaps because it was so clearly about sex and death? / Enjoyed the servant wanting to better herself.

d) Absolutely everything. / Brilliant. Mesmerising. / It was good! / Really enjoyed it.

2. What aspects of the production did you most enjoy?

a) The way in which the relationship dynamic was able to tell a story about the time and the change between classes, but also how the servant's potential for future growth was greater than Mrs Woolf's. / The class struggle. The poetic language. / The contradiction between Woolf's politics and her actions.

b) Immersive set in the round, projections on fabric. / The visuals and the lighting. The lighting perfectly moved the actors from room to room while keeping both in one place. Beautiful. / Set uncomplicated and worked. / Set design excellent. / Staging in the round worked well. / The incorporation of video was very effective. / Use of lighting.

c) The intelligence of the play. Language, style, accents. / The radiance. Writing was great and easy to follow. / I liked the poetic mood of the play. / I really enjoyed the richness of the language and the many lovely observations.

d) Two very good actresses stayed in character throughout. / Excellent acting and choreography round the set. / Felt lost in the whole production. / Great roles for women. / Actresses excellent. / The pace.

e) Comical realistic banter between characters. / I liked the occasional bits of humour. / The fox-trot./ Humour well-timed.

f) The ever-present sound of the sea. / The soothing waves. The beautiful sparse set. / Minimal set worked well. / The sound. / Very clear direction. Very clean transitions between scenes and reflections. / Music. / The soundtrack was nice.

g) The sense of reality (inner reality).

h) The unique relationship between the two women. / The depiction of the relationship between Woolf and Millie.

i) Virginia's (phone) conversation with TS Eliot.

3. Can you identify any 'spiritual' moments that you felt were there in the production tonight?

a) Perhaps the discussion of the 'vision'? / I expected Woolf to be spiritual but absolutely loved Milly and her vision. / Virginia Woolf comes across as a deeply spiritual person.

b) The Leonard Woolf episode. / When the man (the husband) touches her

shoulders.

c) Not really. I thought there were a few but can't exactly say where. / Yes, I can. / Spiritual sometimes. / It felt more like a personal/emotional journey than a spiritual one. / I am not a 'spiritual person' so I rarely feel spirituality in anything. / Not sure how to define spiritual. The projection of the stars gave me a sense of the universe and notions of God.

d) The monologues of Virginia about life and her experiences of the other world. / Yes, when Virginia speaks at the end. / Virginia's musing about the cosmos and the sense of detachment. / The simultaneous power and impotency of words. / Woolf's language hinted at spiritual issues. / The silence and stillness around the text. / References to nature and Virginia's insight and obsessive narcissistic traits. / Thoughts (regarding) writing and how it manifests and impacts on individuals.

e) (Virginia) hearing sounds. / Loneliness and desperation. Brink of madness.

f) Dreamy imagery on the curtain during phone calls.

g) The relationship between them and the world changing and relationships with time. / The attempt of the two women to reach each other, particularly in the violent scene and the napkin-wrapping scene. / The unique relationship between the two women. / The opening up of the characters as the piece progressed. / Probably when they nearly kissed. / Virginia's anger at Millie bordered on unhealthy mental attitude.

h) Spiritual moments [in] what's unexpected.

i) When the two characters were connected to the non-human. / The idea of the mystical. / The opening of the box. / Storms.

j) The scene in which the servant, Millie, recounts her experience of the fairground. / Moments of simplicity and pleasure: going to the beach, Hampstead Heath. / Millie's description of the fair.

4. **Any other thoughts?**

a) A very inspirational play. / A powerful and beautifully-crafted show. / Very well done. / This should be performed to a wider ? —Almeida / Donmar—audience. / Excellent show. / A very interesting show. Really enjoyed the piece.

b) Good use of light and shade. / Good use of sound in the background. / The whole of the production: lighting, sound, projections were wonderful.

c) Great insight into how life for Virginia might actually have been, especially the telephone call with T.S. Eliot and the turkey gobble dance! / Reciprocity of who serves whom.

d) Really enjoyed it. Made me think. / An excellent show. Very enjoyable evening. / I thought it was surprisingly funny in parts. / Lots to think about. / Liked the moments of philosophy and humour. / I really enjoyed it.

e) Perhaps there were occasions when there felt like there were no 'active questions'. It felt as if it could end at various points. / Lagged towards the end. Several moments I thought were the end but weren't.

f) The lesbian relationship could be developed. / Would have liked to hear more of Leonard's voice and 'point of view' in the action. / Would have liked to see more development of Millie. She existed too much as a reactive character.